AFTER COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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AFTER COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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AFTER COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

THE CRISIS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Comparative literature as it was once conceived no longer exists. Of course, there continue to be departments or at least centers of comparative literature at the more prestigious universities in Europe and North America, but the changes to the programs formed in the mid-20th century by the founding fathers of comparative literature, Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, and René Wellek, have been so radical that almost nothing of the once popular, respected, and influential "Comp Lit" remains, aside from the name. Since the early 1990s in America, later in Europe, spirited and contentious debate has surrounded the question of the subject matter and methods of comparative literature. American comparatists, whose understanding of "new comparative literature" greatly influences the rest of the world, dictate the subject and tone of these discussions, which reflect some of the key issues facing the state of the humanities in the world today, and thus extend beyond the confines of literary scholarship.

The American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Report issued in 1995, edited by Charles Bernheimer, co-chair of the program in Comparative Literature and

Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania, represents the institutional paradigm shift affecting comparative literature. Bernheimer suggests that the traditional "rhetorical" approaches to literary study, which could be described in Wellekian terms as "intrinsic" or "analytical", be supplemented by methods that "take account as well of the … contexts" of literary works. In the 1990s, there was a profusion of such contextual or, to again use Wellek's terminology, "extrinsic" approaches, some of which were singled out by Bernheimer himself: feminist criticism, Foucauldian discourse analysis, Bakhtinian scholarship, Marxist criticism, postcolonial studies, area studies, cultural studies, translation studies (Bernheimer 1995a: 7-8). Although sometimes radically divergent, these approaches nonetheless share one thing in common: they do not take literature as the exclusive or even main object of study, rather they consider it but a discursive form reflective of more general phenomena: language, ideology, gender, and identity, which have become the true subject of comparative study.

The fact that literature is no longer the only or the preferred object of study in the "new comparative literature" has led many comparatists, and not only those of a traditional bent, to conclude that comparative literature has been beset by the most serious crisis in its history: some have even declared the "death of the discipline".[1] The old proverb that every cloud has a silver lining has proved to be true even in this instance: questions concerning the subject, method, and overall nature of comparative literature have instigated one of the most vigorous and theoretically most interesting debates in contemporary literary studies. In the quest for new definitions of comparative literature – which is to say: the idea of "comparative literature", but also the related ideas of "world" and "national" literature,

[1] E.g., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the influential book by the same name, *Death of a Discipline* (2003).

the "canon", "world literary space", "the literary market", "center" and "periphery" – comparatists have found themselves at the very heart of contemporary literary-theoretical thought. The most influential concepts in comparative and world literature, apart from the ideas of French comparatists, especially Pascale Casanova's "world republic of letters", are currently being formulated in the United States. It would not be wrong to state that America continues to dominate studies in comparative literature in the 21st century. The specific features differentiating American from European comparative literature will be outlined in this introduction. Before that, however, it is necessary to establish that in this work, the term *comparative literature* will be used in its broadest sense, to indicate various comparative studies that take account of both "rhetorical" approaches and "contexts". It will be used as an umbrella term inclusive of general literature, which is sometimes distinguished from comparative literature for important reasons.

Although the crisis of comparative literature was identified by American comparatists at the start of the 20th century, there are still those who deem such a diagnosis overly pessimistic and even inaccurate. Their view of the crisis befalling the discipline is that it is instead merely the latest in a series of paradigm shifts resulting in new methodologies and the inception of a new field of study. A change to the method and object of study does not mean the inevitable death of the discipline; on the contrary, it points to the discipline's vitality and great evolutionary potential, which is to say its ability to adapt its methodology to the new cultural-historical context. Adherents of this view point out that throughout the history of comparative literature, from the 19th century to this day, there have been so many methodological breaks, so many different conceptions of what the 'most accurate' methods are, and such wide-ranging polemics over what the true object of study should be that

comparative literature can be said to be marked by methodological self-reflection and shaped by a permanent, productive methodological crisis.

Precedents for such and similar arguments can be found in the history of comparative literature, but are not entirely convincing when applied to the current state of the field in America and elsewhere. Although it may be true that comparatists from Abel-François Villemain to Samuel Weber were never loath to debate their methods, a very important difference separates the current state of the discipline from all that is known of its long tradition: today, literature is no longer studied *as literature*. However great the differences between the various approaches, schools, and individuals in the history of comparative literature have been, however irascible the polemics among their various American, French, Eastern and Western European counterparts could be, one thing was *never* at issue: the belief that the only true subject of comparative literature is literature itself, as distinct from other products of man. Thus, comparatists studied "literariness", which is to say the aesthetic value and nature of literary works, to use Wellek's formulation (Wellek 1965: 293).

Today this is no longer so. Literature is studied ever less as literature and more as a vehicle of a broader ideological, religious, or cultural discourse. Traditional comparative literature has been supplanted by popular interdisciplinary or cultural studies, which view literary works as cultural products, and are often completely and consciously dismissive of their linguistic and stylistic features. It is as if no one believes that literature has the capacity for anything but politics or ideology. Worse, it seems that according to popular belief, it is not just literature that is not worth studying, but the humanities in general. In that respect, it may be said that comparative literature as *literary* study no longer exists

in America, or anywhere else. The fatal diagnosis mentioned above is, unfortunately, entirely accurate.

In the words of an American comparatist colleague, one of the greatest professional challenges for comparatists in the United States today is to explain to state and private sponsors, those who oversee university finances, the significance of such studies and why it is important for serious universities to have comparative literature departments.[2] The program of study in comparative literature has changed considerably in the past two decades at American universities. The reason for this can be found in the fact that university administrators have been unreceptive to the arguments made in support of comparative literature. Many comparative literature departments have been closed or integrated into other departments or centers, usually within a framework of comparative or interdisciplinary studies. Those which remain intact as traditionally-conceived university departments have seen a flourishing of special programs that serve an auxiliary function. As a rule, they are interdisciplinary, which means they offer courses in film, art history, philosophy, and even political economy in addition to literature, and students of all profiles can take the courses offered. The programs are partly financed by the department itself (which receives additional funding on

[2] The description that follows of the current state of comparative literature in American universities is the result of research I conducted in 2007-8 during my stay as a Fulbright scholar at Northwestern University in Chicago. At that time, I carried out a survey among professors of comparative literature and national literatures at Northwestern, in which Regina Schwartz, Jorge Coronado, Samuel Weber, and Andrew Wachtel participated, among others. They answered a dozen questions concerning the state of comparative literature today and its standing in American universities. Their answers confirmed the conclusion that can also be reached by extensive study of literature in this field. See, for example: Manuela Mourão (2002: 131-141); Rey Chow (1995: 107-116); Jonathan Culler (1995: 117-121); Andrew Wachtel (2005: 117-127).

their behalf, often more substantial than the base budget), various foundations, generous donors, and the parent university. By working within such programs, teaching staff are able to secure additional sources of funding and supplement their teaching load. The number of students enrolled at comparative literature departments has decreased in the past two decades because students, for practical reasons, mostly select programs in which the curriculum is determined by the laws of the market and not the demands of basic scholarship and even less by the traditional ideals of the humanities. Simply put, students know that it will be easier for them to find a job if they specialize in one national literature, such as English, Spanish, or French, and take an interdisciplinary, i.e. comparative, course alongside that, in literary history, film, philosophy, sociology, translation theory, creative writing, etc. It goes without saying that little of the old, Auerbachian ideal of the profound and extensive understanding of world literature remains in such programs.

In order to survive, many traditional comparative literature departments have thus been adapted to the new academic model, and classes are mostly taught by professors of philosophy and sociology, not by 'true' comparatists, which is to say that today there are almost no job opportunities for those comparatists who deal exclusively with literature. This is why comparatists are increasingly turning to fields which are, at best, only loosely connected to literature. In the onslaught of interdisciplinary programs, the first to go, together with professors of comparative literature, were the rudiments of traditional comparative studies: textual criticism and its natural ally, textual analysis, the study of influences, the comparison of national literatures, and traditional comparative and/or national literary canons as a collection of works which because of their exceptional value become the universal heritage of

all mankind.[3] Still, certain parts of the canon would appear to endure: it could be said, for example, that Shakespeare survived even the latest revolution in comparative literature studies. But that impression is misleading. The interdisciplinary Shakespeare is not so much, or at least not first and foremost, the author of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* as he is representative of the Renaissance experience of the world manifest not just in literature but in religion, law, philosophy, and art. In other words, Shakespeare's dramas are no longer studied only for their literary value but are considered documents or records of a certain time and place, equally as important as other documents from the same period, or else they are analyzed interdisciplinarily, in the context of various media, literatures, film, and theatre.

There are two main reasons, aside from the laws of the market, why the traditional comparative canon has been rejected and replaced by new interdisciplinary reading lists. The first can be called "political" as it concerns the struggle for power as well as academic clout. Theoretical views that were until recently, at least at university institutions, considered marginal – feminist studies, gender studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies – now play an important role in the design of curricula. This is especially true of postcolonial studies. All of these programs of study seek to revise the traditional comparative canon in a bid to enhance their university standing, and all of them suggest their preferred texts as alternatives to the classics of world literature. In this way, the old canon – often accused of being "Eurocentric" – has been replaced by a large number of small or local canons: the women's canon, the gay canon, the African canon, the Latino canon. Related to this is the establishment of

[3] In the words of Samuel Weber, the traditional canon continues to have its place only in English literature departments, which are as a rule the largest departments, with enough professors to 'cover' the entire history of English and American literature.

new kinds of professorial chairs at American universities. During the golden age of American comparative literature in the mid-20th century, course profiles and curriculum content were largely set out by European immigrants like Spitzer, Auerbach, and Wellek, and most professorial chairs were occupied by white males, often Jews in exile from Eastern Europe and the USSR. Today, however, professors of literature and comparatists are largely women, Latino-Americans and immigrants from Middle and Far Eastern countries. Accordingly, there is an increasing receptivity to "marginal" or previously neglected literatures like Chinese and Japanese literature, post-colonial literatures, "women's letters", or themes related to gender or sexual orientation.

Another reason for the rejection of the traditional comparative canon is the ascendancy of theory in comparative literature studies. Previously uninterested in theory, American literary criticism underwent a fundamental transformative shift in the 1970s and 1980s, effected by the displacement of literary analysis by the dissemination of theory largely imported from Europe.[4] Among the European constructs imported to America, undoubtedly the most popular was deconstruction, which influential thinkers at the time, like Jacques Derrida or Paul de Man, advanced in their works. Deconstruction promoted the idea of the "other", the marginal, the non-canonic as theoretically central, and quickly proved to be influential in "new comparative literature". In the United States at that time, the "other" and "marginal" were also central to other influential theories, including the revival of Marxist criticism in the post-structuralist literary and cultural criticism of Fredric Jameson, as well as the postcolonial theory of Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Orientation towards the "other", "subaltern", and "alternative" led

[4] See: Bernheimer: 1995: 4-5; Wachtel 2005:120; Damrosch 2011: 464.

some comparatists to call into question the literary canon, which was soon spoken of as being not just "Eurocentric", but hegemonic, elitist, and exclusionary. Post-structuralist theories such as postcolonial criticism, deconstructionist close-reading, or variations of Lacanian psychoanalysis are now seen as 'classics' of literary theory at American universities, their methods considered slightly outdated. Deconstruction had already become academically unfashionable in the late 1980s, just as suddenly as it had become fashionable in the late 1970s, together with the publication of Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading* (1979). In its twilight, the fate of deconstruction was also somewhat determined by de Man's demise. Deconstruction's fall from grace as the preferred literary critical method in America coincided with the discovery of de Man's collaborationist past and the anti-Semitic articles he published as a young journalist in the Belgian paper *Le Soir* during the Second World War. It is maintained by some that the waning of deconstruction as a viable theoretical paradigm at American universities marked the end of the period in which 'pure theory' dominated the curriculum in comparative literature departments. In the wake of the decline of not just deconstruction but literary theory in general, a period began in which comparative literature turned to praxis, in other words, to the consideration of literature in a variety of non-literary contexts.[5] It is as if deconstruction, long after its fall, left a lasting legacy to comparative literature through the aim to overthrow the traditional comparative "Eurocentric" canon and replace it with an alternative canon.

[5] Bernheimer 1995: 6-7. Nor was the status of deconstruction helped much by the other more prosaic accusations against de Man, for example, that of fraud and forgery or that of bigamy. See: Stanley Corngold (1994: 177-193).

COMPARATIVE AND WORLD LITERATURE

Recently, the focus of American comparative literature has been on cultural studies, more specifically postcolonial studies, and also on a theory that, strangely, appears never to have aged in the eyes of American professors of literature: Marxism. Some universities continue to offer courses in literary theory, though most of these begin with structuralism, which means that any period prior to and including the 19th century, covering the history of comparative literature, is left to the chance curiosity of a few unconventional researchers. Considering that last point, it would not be wrong to say that the final blow to the traditional comparative canon, and comparative studies in general, was delivered by none other than comparatists themselves.

Those comparative methods that continue to be used are a good indication of the state of comparative literature in America today. Of all of them, the most tenacious has proved to be the "history of ideas". This should come as no surprise, as this method was always favored over other approaches employed in Europe, such as influence studies. What is more, this traditional Lovejoyan[6] method is particularly compatible with the current conception of interdisciplinary studies, which approaches literary works through

[6] The method known as the history of ideas was popularized in the United States in the 1930s. According to Wellek, it is an approach to intellectual history according to which literature is treated as a document important to the understanding of certain philosophical ideas. Literary history viewed through the lens of the history of ideas is thought to correspond to and reflect intellectual history, i.e. the development of ideas in philosophy. These ideas were effectively demonstrated by Arthur Lovejoy in the book *The Great Chain of Being* (1936), which traces the development of the "scale of nature" (*scala naturae*) from Plato to Schelling through various intellectual and scientific disciplines: philosophy, the natural sciences, theology, and literature. In contemporary terminology, the history of ideas incorporates interdisciplinary study of the above but also other more or less similar disciplines (see Wellek 1985: 111-112).

content, ideas, or 'material', dismissing the distinctive qualities of literary works: form, language, and style. Genre theory and thematology (or *Stoffgeschichte*) remain of the old themes and methods. The appropriation of genre models in comparatism can be explained by the fact that the traditional, historical-chronological approach to works has been almost entirely rejected; works are largely categorized and studied according to analogous themes, genres, or literary devices. The old thematological approach has been 'enriched' by an interdisciplinary perspective, since recurring themes and motifs are no longer only traced through different national literatures but also through different media: television, newspapers, film, music, the fine arts, and corresponding disciplines. That which is considered in Europe to be the most comparative practice of all – the comparison of works from two different national literatures – is no longer practiced. Finally, translation theory occupies an important place in comparative studies in America, and is sometimes also called "new comparative literature".[7] For the most part, only the oldest and most prestigious American comparative literature departments have retained conservative programs. For example, at Yale, in addition to new programs embracing postcolonial topics, feminist and queer studies, film studies, and other interdisciplinary programs, students are also offered a large number of courses that, judging by their titles and descriptions, are still conceived along the lines of traditional comparative literature: examples of these are courses on Joyce and Proust, Rilke and Yeats, autobiography and fiction, modernist poetry, folk and fairy tales.[8] It seems that at Harvard, program innovation has gone a step further, but there, too, among the mostly interdisciplinarily conceived courses, it is still possible to find course

[7] See: Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, 2006.
[8] See: http://catalog.yale.edu/ycps/subjects-of-instruction/literature/#coursestext

offerings more typical of comparative literature: history and drama, the historical novel after modernism, the 20th century European novel, Homer and oral literature.[9]

Leaving aside the nostalgic lament of certain comparatists,[10] it seems that the golden age of comparative literature and literary studies in general is no longer mourned by anyone today. On the contrary, the tone of certain so-called new comparatists often gives away their celebration of the demise of Wellekian intellectual elitism and what they deem to be the Eurocentric exclusivity of the traditional comparative canon. Welcoming the idea of an expanded comparative literature with open arms, the new generation of American comparatists have leaped onto the soil of "little" languages and "other" literatures and launched the comparative literature project as a "laboratory for exploration at the margins".[11]

But, before identifying some of the more important characteristics of "new comparative literature", it is necessary to draw attention to a characteristic of traditional American comparative literature that played an important, perhaps even decisive role in shaping its contemporary form. From the 1950s, that is, from the time when comparative literature began to gain a firm stronghold in American universities, a significant difference emerged between the study of *comparative* and *world* literature. That difference is less pronounced in Europe than it is in America where methodology and socio-economic factors have proved divisive. David Damrosch explains that in the United States this distinction extends "along lines of class

[9] See: http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/courses-exams/courses-instruction/comparative-literature

[10] See: Wellek (1994: 1-13); Levin (1994: 13-25); Riffaterre (1995: 66-77); Culler (1995: 117-122).

[11] This phrase was coined by Thomas Rosenmeyer in the essay, "Am I a Comparatist?" (1994: 62).

and of geography" (Damrosch 2011: 459). At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, comparative literature departments that were founded at old, elite, and costly universities in the Northeastern United States – Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Cornel – expected prospective students to have a solid knowledge of French, German, and Latin. Such knowledge, together with a classical humanist education, could only be attained by students insofar as they had previously attended elite and equally expensive preparatory schools, which effectively meant that comparative literature studies at such universities were accessible only to wealthy students from higher social classes. Students at those universities also enjoyed certain privileges. In addition to the subjects already mentioned, other languages and literatures were offered – proportionate to the size and wealth of the universities in question.[12] In comparative literature departments, works were read exclusively in the original; reading literature in translation was not acceptable at the undergraduate level, and even less so at the postgraduate level. Comparatists whose knowledge of foreign literature was derived only from translation were not considered true comparatists but amateurs and dilettantes. Insofar as a language was not offered at a given university, it was not possible to study the corresponding literature within the framework of comparative literature studies (Damrosch 2011: 458).

At the same time, world literature departments proliferated at state universities in the American Midwest and

[12] The study of comparative literature is sometimes seen as a mark of prestige. Rey Chow in the work, "In the Name of Comparative Literature" writes: "Comparative literature … means prestige, cosmopolitanism, and power – except that it enjoys the reputation of a discipline with a long tradition; it is also a kind of 'classy' designer label, like Armani, Dior, Givenchy, Saint Laurent, which many want to show off" (Chow 1995: 107).

South (Iowa, Wisconsin, Colorado).[13] Less prior knowledge was expected of students there, who mostly came from poor families; classes were taught entirely in English, and students could read works in translation. Courses in world literature were conceived as historical overviews that mostly comprised works from the five "great" literatures of Europe (English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish), with some works from American and classical literature, and, sometimes, Russian or other "small" European literatures. World literature drew criticism from the comparative literature camp less because of insufficient knowledge of foreign languages than because of this kind of synthetic course, which was believed to fall short of the high standards of university education. Werner Friederich, one of the most important American comparatists and the founder of the comparative literature program at the University of North Carolina, did not see translation to be a great danger to this type of study, but he categorically rejected any notion that world literature could be taught as a form of overview (Friederich and Gohdes 1949: 135).

Courses in world literature were usually offered under the title of "Great Books" and designed for undergraduates, though could not be elected as a major. By contrast, comparative literature was offered as a program of study at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In this way, world and comparative literature endured, in peaceful coexistence but without much love between them, for almost half a century. In the past decade, however, for reasons already mentioned, comparative literature has begun to lose the reputation it once enjoyed in academic and scholarly circles, while world literature has begun to occupy an increasingly important

[13] Damrosch cites the fact that in the 1950s at the University of Iowa, enrollment rose from 40 to 400 in just a few years and that the dean of the Business School at the same university required his students to take a course in world literature (Damrosch 2011: 458).

place in university curricula. Courses in world literature designed for both undergraduates and postgraduates have also begun to appear at elite universities (D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir 2011: xx). In the new clothes of global or planetary literature, world literature is almost entirely superseding Wellekian comparative literature. It has even been taken up by some Harvard professors, who saw in the broadening of horizons to include "small" nations and literatures the opportunity to show that they had succeeded in shedding the prejudice of American exceptionalism. David Damrosch speaks to this when he writes:

> Comparatists based in the United States have a particular challenge in combating what Gayatri has criticized as "multi-culti" American exceptionalism, the unexamined belief that a nation of immigrants can celebrate some Disneyfied diversity without doing the hard work of learning anything substantial about other cultures. This is certainly an American problem, but I would say that there are very few countries where there's not a covert exceptionalism, a cryptonationalism or even open jingoism, deeply engrained within comparative studies. It takes a different form in different countries, both ideologically and institutionally, but whatever our location, our job is to use world literature to shake comparative literature out of its dogmatic slumber, to critique its nationalist self-involvement… (Damrosch 2011: 464)[14]

First accused of elitism and exclusivity, then of chauvinism and narcissism, Wellekian comparative literature receded from American universities, yielding to politically correct transnational world literature. However, this was

[14] With the goal to promote world literature, Damrosch together with Theo D'haen and Djelal Kadir published a comprehensive and ambitiously conceived anthology in 2011 dedicated to the history and theory of world literature, the *Routledge Companion to World Literature*. The anthology contains 50 essays, some of which were authored by eminent contemporary comparatists: John Pizer, Jonathan Arac, Michael Holquist, César Domínguez, and others.

no longer the same world literature that had been taught at state universities, but an ideologically and politically sound, empowered, and heterogeneous planetary literature. That said, contempt for elitism did not stop some of the new comparatists from attempting to supplant the old comparatism. Among the various claimants to its legacy and vacancies in comparative literature departments, the most vocal proved to be representatives of two approaches, both emerging after 2000, closely tied to language studies and translation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak formulated the first approach. Inspired by ideas Edward Said forwarded in his study *Orientalism* (1978), and as a response to the crisis in comparative literature studies, she proposed in her influential work *Death of a Discipline*[15] the founding of a new type of comparative literature that, reactivating an old geopolitical idea, she called area studies. For Spivak, area studies are a variation of postcolonial cultural studies and are more political than literary by nature: their ostensible goal is to defeat American "monolingualism" and domination of the English language, and to end all cultural monopolies founded on a concentration of economic, social, and political power. Of all of the approaches of "new" or "other" comparative studies, Spivak's approach is the most methodologically radical because it implies a complete rejection of traditional "Eurocentric" comparative studies in favor of "small" or insufficiently researched literatures and cultures. In her thought, the crisis of comparative literature cannot be overcome by supplementing the traditional comparative canon with "other" literatures, as Damrosch proposes and is usually the practice at American universities. The old canon needs to be completely rejected in favor of a new, alternative canon of subaltern languages and literatures,

[15] *Death of a Discipline*, 2003. This book expands on three lectures Spivak delivered in May 2000 at the University of California, Irvine, entitled, "A New Comparative Literature".

and old comparative literature replaced with the new (Spivak 2012: 468-469). It is in this respect that the phrase from the title of her book, "death of a discipline", should be understood:

> All my examples so far have been postcolonial, tied to New Immigrant groups in the United States… It seems to me that a planetary Comparative Literature must attempt to move away from this base… [I hope that it] will touch the older minorities [in the U.S.]: African, Asian, Hispanic. It will take in its sweep the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today's breaking world… The old postcolonial model – very much "India" plus the Sartrian "Fanon"[16] – will not serve now as the master model for transnational to global cultural studies on the way to planetarity. We are dealing with heterogeneity on a different scale… (Spivak 2003: 84-85)

It is not difficult to see even from this short extract that the focus of "new comparative literature" as a "transnational global study" lies in political and not cultural or literary questions. Spivak advocates the planetary propagation of comparative literature along a geopolitical path that, as Didier Coste[17] noted, is redolent of the path along which the American conquest of new markets and economic resources is advancing. Apart from that, it is clear that Spivak grants a special place to Islam – though it is not clear in which respect, whether as a religion or as a more general cultural tradition – which is also in accordance with America's current foreign policy.

[16] Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a writer and philosopher of Afro-French descent from Martinique. Sartre wrote the preface to his novel *Les damnés de la terre* (1961).

[17] https://www.academia.edu/756225/Literature_Comparative_Global_or_Planetary_A_Critique_of_some_mainly_American_Positions The work represents a version of a lecture Coste held in July 2004, at The Department of Comparative Literature at the Jadavpur University in India. It was published in the university's journal, the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, vol. 41, 2003-2004.

DENATIONALIZED COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Speaking of the vision of "new comparativism", Spivak in a later work cites the phenomenon of Creole languages, more specifically the idea of "Creolity" as formulated by Édouard Glissant in the late 1990's.[18] According to Glissant, Creolity is a confluence that results in a permanent permeation of different languages and cultures with no clear final outcome. Creolity is a natural companion to cultural globalization, in which the unexpected encounter of heterogenous, mutually distant cultures produce equally unexpected results, cultural identities that are entirely different from the mere sum or synthesis of the elements that comprise them. We can predict the outcome of confluence, Glissant writes, but we cannot predict the outcome of Creolity. Glissant uses the notion of "Relation" to describe the cultural identity that ensues from the process of Creolity. In the globalized world, a culture's identity is not finished, complete, or self-enclosed; it is continuously being formed, unfinished and open to other cultural identities.[19]

Creole languages, like cultural identity in general, also take shape in relation to an "other". These languages are vernacular or, as Spivak calls them, "natural" languages that evolved out of an official, "normative" literary language. In other words, Creole languages originated as "corrupt" vulgar speech or dialects. "All the various speeches that together make up 'Italian,'" Spivak writes, "are simply vulgar speech – Latin Creole" – just like Provençal, French, and all of the other Romance languages were before they were grammaticized, in other words, until they were normalized. Spivak maintains that a speaker of a Creole language does not experience the 'dominant', i.e. normative,

[18] "World Systems and the Creole", *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Spivak 2012: 443-455).
[19] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

language as a foreign language but is in equal possession of both the Creole and the normative language, and uses both equally: "Latin is not a 'foreign' language to Dante. The conversation between Virgil and Dante is in Latin, not in a foreign language." (Spivak 2012: 447)

Spivak draws an analogy to the relationship between Creole languages and the 'dominant' language from which they were derived in order to reconsider literature. Just like how in Dante's time in Italy there was only one language with a grammar (Latin) and by contrast many non-normative or "natural" languages, in literature there is usually also a single normative literary canon and many "small", distant, insufficiently researched, uncanonized literatures. "New comparativism", in the form of area studies, researches precisely those uncanonized, or in Spivak's terms, "subaltern", literatures. "Subaltern" literatures are in a continuous relation of "Creolity"; they converge and permeate with one another, creating new and unexpected identities (Spivak 2012: 453).

In referencing Creolity, Spivak is challenging more than just the traditional "Eurocentric" comparative canon: the scope and implications of a somewhat overwhelming idea of a planetary cultural identity allows her to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. Firstly, Glissant's view of national identity as being ambiguously "related" to another, similar identity represents in area studies an alternative to the traditional nineteenth-century understanding of national identity expressed in the well-known triad "one nation – one language – one territory". This latter understanding of national identity is also central to the traditional conception of national literatures, originating in 18th century Germany and still present, according to Spivak, in some contemporary approaches to comparative literature.[20] A conception

[20] For example, in Pascale Casanova's approach (Spivak 2012: 453).

that sees the literature of a nation as a self-contained organism, distinct from all similar organisms of the same kind, is for Spivak, in the contemporary, globalized world, outdated and unfounded: it is an expression of nationalism, intolerance, and ethnic exclusivity. She proposes instead that world literature be viewed as a system that functions according to the principle of "Creolity", which is to say, the convergence and permeation of different cultural identities.

Secondly, by using the notion of Creolity as a metaphor for the process of globalization, Spivak is challenging another idea of world literature at odds with comparative literature, which in the past decade has gained much popularity in America and elsewhere. This is Franco Moretti's framework which, inspired by the socio-economic theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, divides world literature into geopolitical zones: core, periphery, and semi-periphery. Spivak objects to the division of world literature into zones because it implies relative inequality, which is to say that it favors "great" literatures at the expense of "small" and "subaltern" ones. Such an approach becomes invalid when world literature is seen as a unique space in which the process of Creolity is continuously unfolding. Spivak criticizes not just Moretti's categorizations, but also his notion of "distant reading" and his view that world literature can and must be studied in translation. Because comparative literature is concerned with texts, it must rely on the method of close reading, from which it follows that the analyst must know the language in which the text is written. The "deep" study of foreign, primarily "small" and "subaltern" languages represents an important aspect of "new comparativism" for Spivak. The idea is sound enough, even to traditional philologists, but the problem is that in Spivak's "new comparativism", very little is read. In a world conceived as a unified system of culture, literature is relegated to a marginal

"subaltern" role. In such a world, literature serves as only one of many lines of communication with the "other", and it is often not the most important, so is recognized only to the degree to which it can help shed light on other political, social, cultural, or ideological phenomena. In other words, the "new", planetary comparative literature is methodologically interdisciplinary, and its primary task is to fight for the political rights of the subaltern, namely those social groups that Spivak describes as having no voice – oppressed peoples, minorities, those disempowered due to their gender or sexuality. For this reason, she also calls her "new comparativism" "comparativism in extremis" (Spivak 2012: 475).

Also more political than literary are translation studies, yet another cultural-literary project to emerge from the United States, also competing for the prestige and status of "new comparativism". One of the most influential expositions of its tenets was formulated by Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone: A new comparative literature* (2006). Like Spivak, Apter also emphasizes that the goal of translation studies, i.e. "new comparative literature", is more pragmatic and political than literary or traditionally humanist. In her opinion, translation in America today, in the wake of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, is no longer a mere conduit for communications in international business, education, and culture; it has become so important with respect to politics and security that it may be said that it sometimes exerts a decisive influence on questions of war and peace. In the aftermath of September 11, when institutions responsible for American national security scrambled to meet the demand for translators proficient in Arabic who would be able to decode the terrorists' conversations and messages, it became abundantly clear just how important the role played by translation is in today's world. In such a political climate, it becomes necessary

to reconsider translation studies. Apter's exposition of her conception of new comparative literature, which may strike traditional comparatists as unusual, thus advocates a radical transformation of "translation studies". A field previously dominated by specific linguistic problems, such as the question of the fidelity of a translation to the original, is now to be transformed into, "a broad theoretical framework that emphasizes the role played by mistranslation in war, the influence of language and literature wars on canon formation and literary fields, the aesthetic significance of experiments with nonstandard language, and the status of the humanist tradition of *translatio studii* in an era of technological literacy" (Apter 2006: 3). There is no real need to emphasize that in translation studies thus conceived, the study of literature for its own sake is, at best, beside the point. When questions of war and peace and the safety of the American nation at large need to be resolved, who would continue to be preoccupied with the trivial analysis of the fidelity of a translation to the original? Or, as a cynic might ask, why would a translator or comparatist be trained to interpret literary works when the future direction of their trade, tied to resolving questions of war and peace, is far more lucrative?

Starting from the premise that language wars, "great and small, shape the politics of translation in the spheres of media, literacy, literary markets, electronic information transfer, and codes of literariness", Apter expanded the field of research, adding to translation studies both a pragmatic aspect concerned with either intelligence-gathering in conditions of war or the "embattlement" of small languages within official cultural institutions, and an impractical or "abstract" aspect to explore the literary appropriation of non-literary languages, linguistic experiments in literature, or the problem of transmedial translation (Apter 2012: 4). On the basis of such an expanded study of translation, she proposes a program for a "new comparative literature":

> I began [this book] with an attempt to rethink the disciplinary "invention" of comparative literature in Istanbul in the 1930's, using the work of Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach as figures whose names became synonymous with defining early iterations of global humanism in exile. I end with some reflections on what happens to philology when it is used to forge a literary comparatism that has no national predicate, and that, in naming itself *translatio* names the action of linguistic self-cognizing, the attempt to bring-to-intelligibility that which lies beyond language (God, Utopia, Nature, DNA, a Unified Field Theory of Expressionism). (Apter 2006: 243)

In a "literary comparatism that has no national predicate", it is not hard to recognize "the transnational global cultural studies on the way to planetarity" (Spivak 2003: 84-85) which, as we have seen, Spivak also advocates.[21] Also citing Glissant and the idea of "Creolity", Apter sees "new comparative literature" as a kind of melting pot, a unique planetary literary system in which some literatures, connecting "laterally" with other literatures, will become so changed that they will lose their unique national characteristics. For both Spivak and Apter, denationalized literature is ideal comparative literature: "Insofar as Creole heralds a condition of linguistic postnationalism and denaturalizes monolingualization (showing it to be an artificial arrest of language transit and exchange), it may be said to emblematize a new comparative literature based on translation" (Apter 2012: 245). But, from a European perspective, especially from the viewpoint of a "small" literature, like that of Serbia, denationalized comparative literature is not necessarily as attractive as it might seem to an American. How will a "marginal" and "subaltern" literature gain a voice if it becomes the subject of hybridization and is melted in the shared identity of a creolized planetary comparativism? As is apparent at the level of mass culture, the relinquishing of national identity often

[21] See above p. 23.

entails the acceptance of a uniform identity that, as a rule, is dictated by the largest and most powerful groups.[22] There is no reason to believe that "great" literature, art, and culture will necessarily fare any better in the planetary melting pot patterned after the American model. In that respect, it seems that Creolity is nothing more than a new name for old phenomena like imperialism and colonialism.

But even disregarding the political aspect of such projects for a "new comparative literature", it is striking how problematic they are in another, academic, sense. The very rhetoric of the "new comparatist", heralding a "brighter" future for a postnationalist planetary literature that has yet to see the light of day, smacks more of a political manifesto than serious academic discourse. However, not even adherence to such rhetoric and careful consideration of its attributes precludes further objections to it. To understand world or "planetary" literature as a unified system in which all borders between literatures have been erased and all differences homogenized as the result of a process of "hybridization" is to challenge the very idea of comparative literature. In as early as the 1950s, Auerbach warned of this in his work, "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'": if all literatures are identical, if all differences are removed, what will there be left to compare?[23] What will the point of comparatism be in a world in which all values are leveled?

[22] Coste recognizes that the postcolonial variety of comparative literature is in danger of "build[ing] a new façade of equality (similar to the 'one nation, one vote' principle in the UN General Assembly), while the real decisions will be made by and for an oligarchy of great powers; it can reduce each national, regional or otherwise community-specific 'literature' to inconvertible currency, autarky, intransitive subsistence economy; it can further humiliate and disable small, minor, peripheral, threatened, subordinate and emergent literatures by confirming them to scheduled castes and isolated ghettos on the pretext of affirmative action" (Coste 2004: 5).

[23] Auerbach 2009: 114-115. Auerbach's conception of world literature and this particular work will be addressed in more detail in the final chapter of this book.

The leveling of all languages and all literatures will mark the end of world literature. On top of that, in the triumph of the globalized world, Auerbach also sees the defeat of the humanities. Although a chapter of Apter's book is dedicated to Auerbach, it seems that she failed to heed the meaning of his warning when she imagined the "new order of comparatism" as denationalized world literature.

Spivak and Apter are in many ways typical representatives of American new comparatism, even in terms of how far their interest in the history of the discipline reaches both into the past and geographically. Both theorists seem to assume that comparatism, as a method of studying literature, emerged in the 1930s in Istanbul, where it was 'invented' by Spitzer and Auerbach, and afterwards brought to America. Reading their works, it is hard to avoid the impression that in the story of how American comparatism came about, Spitzer and Auerbach became protagonists more because of their emigrant fates than because of their genuine contribution to the field of philology. Whatever the case may be, European comparatism is represented in the United States mostly through the figures of its two founding fathers. If Goethe and Marx are added as the forerunners of the idea of a world or planetary literary market, the picture Americans have of European comparatism will be more or less complete.[24] If truth be told, both Spivak and Apter in their most recent books also mention Casanova together with a few American and Asian comapratists, and Spivak also puts Coste on her list of European comparatists and "moderate" critics, but only because, among the various lines of legitimate criticism he directed against her, he objected to her "American hegemony".[25] However, the American comparatists mention

[24] See: Spivak "Rethinking Comparativism" (2014: 467-483); Apter "Global *Translation*: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933" (2003: 253-281).

[25] Apter, *Against World Literature*, 2013; Spivak, 2012; Coste 2004:3.

their European colleagues only in passing, out of courtesy, and without a genuine interest in their ideas. If these two authors are taken to be exponents of the "new comparative literature", it must be concluded that not only does this type of comparatism fail to reach the high standards of traditional comparative literature, but it also falls short of the standards "new comparativism" set for itself: it seeks diversity but ends up privileging the American cultural model, it seeks to hear the voice of the marginalized and subaltern but ends up "hybridizing", it seeks political correctness but ends up obliterating true literary values.

Because the introduction to this type of book is typically written last, it is perhaps not too early to state the conclusion that I reached as I worked on this book. It should be said that I had not set out to find it; on the contrary, it imposed itself on me through my simply engaging with "new comparative literature", so it seems to me to be that much more significant. There is a frequent misconception that academic study in general, so also the study of literature in particular, are worlds unto themselves, separate from everyday and ordinary life. Such a conviction is harmless enough. But from it stems the dangerous misconception that academic disciplines as such, and thus academic study in general, are divested of a political dimension. Changes in methodology are often only explained by intrinsic reasons when they are actually just as often conditioned by a complex network of different contextual, so also political, reasons. This misconception is especially injurious when it comes to literary studies. There is a widespread belief that philology is merely the love of texts, almost completely uninfluenced by extrinsic factors. Trends in contemporary comparative literature, above all in America, tell a completely different story, however. As has been established, "new comparative literature" in America is more of a geopolitical than

a philological project, and the discipline in Europe is also developing along similar lines, especially ever since post-colonial and cultural studies entered European universities. Confirming Auerbach's bleak prediction, the idea of globalism has successfully conquered the study of philology in Europe as well.

That said, a more careful look at the history of comparative literature reveals that the discipline was never politically 'naïve'. The examples I have explored here consistently point to the same thing: trends and fashions in comparative literature have always been contextually conditioned, and the fate of this discipline, throughout its history, has often been determined just as much by internal as by external factors that are undeniably political in nature. When it was still nascent, the study of comparative literature in the "great" nations was partly motivated by those countries' imperialist tendencies and bid to prevail as the largest European nation. In the "little" nations, the study of comparative literature was tied to nation building and the bid to gain recognition for their respective nations in the great European 'family', not just in a literary-cultural sense but in a political one as well. The connection between scholarship and politics can be clearly seen in the example of Russia, i.e. the Soviet Union, where comparative literature did not develop as a systematic program because until the mid-1950s it was considered "bourgeois" so became an unpopular field of research. Similarly, the example of American comparative literature also confirms this connection. Its "golden age", which began in the years following the Second World War and lasted through the end of the 1980s, was of course primarily shaped by the fact that a number of very strong theoretical minds (Spitzer, Auerbach, Wellek) simultaneously exercised their influence, but it was also the product of concrete institutional support and a favorable socio-political climate. The dissemination of the idea of

comparative or world literature was seen by Friederich as a sort of mission to preserve Western European culture and raise it from the ashes of war. Convinced that the Western World, specifically Western Europe and America, were a politically and culturally unified whole, Friederich asserted that the work done by American comparatists was part of the deeper meaning of the Marshall Plan and that comparative literature could help America escape the "lethargy … of political provincialism".[26]

The latest developments in American comparative literature seem to reinforce this view of things. The ultimate and probably definitive "death of [the] discipline" can also be explained by internal and external factors. The lack of methodological invention, the superfluity of theory, the turn away from the specificity of literature as an artistic fact, and the move towards literature as ideological discourse and a historical document may have been the early warning signs of the impending death of traditional comparative literature in America. The external factors behind the loss of more significant institutional support for comparative literature studies, on the one hand, and the burgeoning of interdisciplinary studies, on the other, should be sought as much in the changes to dominant cultural paradigms, the spread of mass media, the technological revolution, and related changes in the labor and education markets, as in the radical change to political and ideological worldviews in the contemporary, post-Cold War, globalized world.

The goal of this book is to illustrate the state of comparative literature today and to point to some of the factors behind the crisis affecting it. In order to understand the type, causes, and consequences of the crisis and, more importantly, in order to assess the consequent losses and possible gains, it is important to turn to the past. As the

[26] See: Friederich 1955: 55-60.

history of comparative literature, especially that of the 19th century, has been thoroughly researched and described at length both in Serbia and elsewhere,[27] there is no need to review it again here in its entirety. Instead, key moments of its development that seem especially relevant today will be highlighted. The second part of this book will focus on two versions of contemporary comparative literature, Moretti's "world literature" and Casanova's "world republic of letters", as they are good illustrations of the state of comparative literature today. Before that, however, some of the terminology will be clarified and the idea of comparative literature will be considered, if in passing.

[27] For Serbian literature on this topic see, for example, Ivo Tartalja, *Počeci rada na opštoj književnosti kod Srba* (*The First Serbian Works on the History of World Literature*), 1964, and Zoran Konstantinović, *Uvod u uporedno proučevanje književnosti* (*Introduction to the Comparative Study of Literature*), 1984.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

THE CONCEPT AND TERM

The meaning of the Serbian term *komparatistika* is often expressed in American English by the phrase "comparative literature".[1] The collocation has become so ubiquitous that the paradox it suggests is no longer apparent. But this was not always so. Proof of this is the anecdote that comparatists often recount about Lane Cooper refusing to call the newly-formed department he headed at Cornell from 1927 "Comparative Literature", claiming that the term made no sense, just as it would make no sense to speak of "comparative potatoes". Instead Cooper insisted that the department be called, "The Comparative Study of Literature".[2] In the United States, as this example suggests, the phrase

[1] The Serbian term *komparatistika* is closest to what is meant in American English by "comparative literature", and is to be distinguished from the phrase *komparativna književnost* (literally, "comparative literature"), which is largely used to refer to the evolution of the French schools of comparative literature. This book, originally written in Serbian, takes as its title, *O Novoj komparatistici* – trans.

[2] Wellek recounts this anecdote in the work, "The Name and the Nature of Comparative Literature" (Wellek 1971: 3-4).

"comparative literature" does not denote a specific body of literary works, such as Serbian, French, Russian, or world literature. By contrast, the Serbian terms "komparativna književnost" and "uporedna književnost", like the equivalent terms in French, Italian, Spanish, and many other languages that follow the same linguistic conventions, are used to denote both the comparative *study* of literature and its history.[3]

The answer to the question of how this study is to be practiced is equally problematic. In the best-known work on this problem, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" (1958), Wellek defines comparative literature as "any study of literature transcending the limits of one national literature" (Wellek 1965: 290). At the time it was formulated, such a broad definition was also the most fitting. The concept of comparative literature since its inception at the start of the 19th century has expressed very different things – the study of sources and influences, the migration of themes and motifs from one national literature to another, contactology,[4] thematology, the history of ideas, "structuralist literary analysis and criticism", cultural history, reception studies, "emission" and "transmission", etc.[5] What is more, the term

[3] These equivalent terms are: *littérature comparée* (fr.), *letteratura comparata* (ital.), *literature comparada* (span.). The Serbian terms *komparativna književnost* and *uporedna književnost*, i.e., *komparativno* or *uporedno proučavanje književnosti*, were used in the original Serbian edition of this book synonymously and were alternated for purely stylistic reasons. It should also be noted here that the Serbian term *komparatistika,* the meaning of which is not obscured by common usage as it is in English, was used throughout the Serbian edition of this work, including in the title, except where common usage dictated otherwise.

[4] This term was introduced by Bulgarian linguist Ivan Lekov to refer to the contact of Russian with European languages. The term was introduced into Serbian by Jovan Ajduković, but does not seem to have much currency in English – trans.

[5] See: Pichois and Rousseau 1973: 143-170.

"comparative literature" is used in both a narrow and a broad sense. For example, it can indicate a particular school or direction, such as the "French school" or "American school", but it can also serve as an umbrella term for questions pertaining to world, general, European, and postcolonial literature, or to the history of ideas, imagology, etc. On top of that, in the last 20 years, the idea of comparative literature has also been used to indicate studies that have no direct relation, if any at all, to the study of literature as literature. In other words, Wellek's definition – according to which comparative literature is defined as the study of *literature* – is not only no longer too broad, but has become too narrow to encompass all of the variations of comparative literature, the focus of which lies somewhere beyond literary works, in "external facts", contexts, or "discursive structures" that need no intrinsic connections to literature. As has been emphasized above, many comparatists consider that the latest transformation undergone by comparative literature marks the end of traditional comparative literature, and some of them opine "the death of a discipline".[6]

The crisis or "death" of comparative literature is but one indicator of a larger crisis that in recent decades has struck and seriously undermined the humanities, which is exactly what one of its founding fathers, Auerbach, pessimistically predicted half a century ago. Warning of the demise of the humanities in the modern world, Auerbach in his work "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'" apprehended the emergence

[6] See above, pp. 22-23. It is not only Spivak who thinks that comparative literature, in its late 20th century American incarnation, no longer exists. The same assessment is also made by the preceding generation of comparatists in, for example, the anthology, *Building of Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States* (Gossman – Spariousu 1994), in which all of the contributors, regardless of their theoretical orientation, convey the impression that the era of comparative literature as they knew it is irretrievably gone.

of a new and what he called "standardized" world, in which the "historicism" that rests on the values of the particular humanistic traditions of Western European cultures would "no longer [have] much practical significance" (Auerbach 2009: 116). Today we are witnessing the fulfillment of Auerbach's prediction on a global scale, and the fate of comparative literature, as a model humanistic discipline, convincingly attests to this.

The very idea of a comparative study of literature originated in France at the start of the 19th century, but the spirit and philosophy of German Romanticism also played an important role in its emergence. The rise of the discipline was preceded by a marked interest in national literatures and cultures, as well as an appreciation for the originality and "spontaneity" of national works of art. According to Henri Peyre, the new discipline emerged in the cosmopolitan climate that prevailed in Europe and most notably in Germany at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, when the Romantic concepts of *Zeitgeist* and *Volksgeist* were first systematically applied to literature (Peyre 1952: 3). Its philosophical basis was partly derived from the Romantic revolt against the normative poetics of the past, specifically the classical idea of there being only one universal standard of beauty, and the complementary phenomenon of historical relativism, specifically Herder's view that beauty is relative to different cultures and to different historical periods. The political context behind the comparative study of national literatures was the political and national awakening in Europe, culminating in sovereign nation-states that were enlightened and aware of the significance of national languages, literatures, and culture in general. Comparative literature was imagined from its inception as a type of metadiscipline or extension of the history of national literatures, and early comparatists, especially those in France, saw it primarily as a historical

discipline and did not much address the kind of theoretical-methodological questions that characterize it today.

The term comparative literature (*littérature comparée*) originated in France. Wellek writes that it was first used at the start of the 19th century, in 1816, in the title of a selection of French, English, and classical Greek and Roman poems,[7] but the real beginning of comparative literature is linked to the French literary historian Abel-François Villemain. Villemain saw European literature as contiguous individual but interconnected national literatures, with French literature being the most influential, and was the first to suggest that they be studied together, as a whole. In 1828 and 1829, he held a series of remarkably well-attended lectures on the influence of the French spirit on 18th century English literature, which he then published in four tomes under the title, *Tableau de la littérature française au XVIII siècle* (*Survey of French Literature in the 18th Century*). In the Preface to the second edition (1840) Villemain rightly boasts that his "comparative analysis" of several modern European literatures was a pioneering endeavor at a French university (Wellek 1971: 10).

The idea of *comparative literature* in this early period was geographically limited: for the most part, it denoted the comparative study of the five "great" Western European literatures which, aside from that of England and France, included German, Italian, and Spanish literature. The chief objects of study were the writers and works of literature that transcended national borders; geniuses like Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Ariosto; representatives of the spirit of a nation, and the standard-bearers of national aspirations and ideals. In the introductory lecture to his course in The Comparison of Foreign Literature

[7] *Cours de littérature comparée* (*Course in Comparative Literature*), Wellek 1971: 10.

delivered at l'Athénée de Paris in 1835, Philarete Euphémon Chasles, professor of Germanic languages and literatures and the second most important French critic of the time after Sainte-Beuve, explains in somewhat bombastic terms what he plans to teach his students:

> Let us study these great men […] let us learn what kind of power was given to them, what they hold from their predecessors, and what they have handed down to their heirs. Let us calculate the influence of one thought upon another, the manner in which people are mutually changed; what each of them has given, and what each of them has received; let us calculate also the effect of this perpetual exchange upon individual nationalities: how, for example, the long-isolated northern spirit finally allowed itself to be penetrated by the spirit of the south; what the magnetic attraction was of France for England, and of England for France […] what has been the influence of theological Germany, artistic Italy, energetic France, Catholic Spain, Protestant England; and how the warm shades of the south have become mixed with the profound analysis of Shakespeare; how the Roman and Italian spirit have embellished and adorned the Catholic faith of Milton; and finally [we shall study the] influences they accept like gifts and all in turn emit new unforeseeable influences in the future! There it is, sirs, the admirable study that I am involved in! It is the intimate history of the human race, it is the drama of literature, for the drama is no more than the relationships of men with men, it is the exchange of intellectual feelings among the all the nations of Europe. (Chasles 1973: 20-21)

Chasles does not limit himself to literature alone, but examines the history of ideas and the intellectual history of Western Europe, which, apart from poets, includes philosophers as well as religious and political thinkers. He admits that although the course will explore the interrelations of the great European nations, its title is inaccurate. His lectures will primarily deal with French literature because, in his

opinion – as in Villemain's, the French nation is superior to the "great" European nations: "France is the most sensitive of all countries […] She is the center […] she directs civilization […] What Europe is to the rest of the world, France is to Europe; everything reverberates towards her, everything ends with her" (Chasles 1973: 21-22).

Also engaged in the study of foreign literature, aside from Chasles and his son Émile,[8] was Edgar Quinet who was a great admirer of Herder's works during his youth; it is said that he learned German in order to translate Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*) into French. Quinet later devoted himself to the study of other European literatures and cultures, especially English. One of his books was *De la Grèce moderne* (*On Modern Greece*). Between 1841 and 1852, he held the chair of Languages and Literatures of Southern Europe at the Collège de France where, according to Alexander Veselovsky, who lived for a time in Paris as a fellowship holder and doctoral candidate, lectures were already being held in comparative literature (Veselovsky 2005: 52). Peyre writes that Quinet became the first professor of comparative literature at the University of Lyons in 1838 (Peyre 1952: 3).[9] However, that claim, which is absent in Wellek, should be viewed with skepticism because Wellek, like other authoritative sources,[10] writes that the Department of Comparative Literature in Lyons, the first of its kind in France, was founded as late as 1896, by Joseph Texte, author of the first real comparative study, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme*

[8] Émile Chasles is the author of a once famous book about Cervantes (*Cervantes: Sa vie, son temps, son oeuvre politique et littéraire*, *Cervantes: His Life, His Times, His Works*, 1866).

[9] In the same place, Peyre writes that Quinet had coined the term *comparative literature* in France, but the verity of that claim remains as yet unconfirmed by other sources.

[10] See, for example, Shulz-Rhein 1973: 107.

littéraire (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature*, 1895), which explores French-English relations before Rousseau and in Rousseau's work. In the two years that followed (1897 and 1898), Texte held a series of lectures on comparative literature at the Sorbonne, where he had been invited, and he would likely have been asked to head a department for comparative literature there had he not been taken ill and died soon thereafter, in 1900, on the eve of the first congress devoted to comparative literature, for which he was both organizer and secretary.[11] But, although comparative literature was not 'officially' an academic discipline in France until 1925, when a department was established at the Sorbonne, the comparative study of literature was very much alive, as the considerable number of monographs in this field corroborate,[12] together with the classes in comparative literature that were developed at the Collège de France. Veselovsky also attests to what comparative study in France was like in the late 19th century:

> One usually selects as the object of study an epoch that is remarkable with respect to culture: for example, 16th century Italian Renaissance, English drama, etc.; yet most frequently a certain great man is called upon to guarantee the unity of vision and the coherence of generalization: Petrarch, Cervantes, Dante and his time, Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The time and the contemporaries do not necessarily play the pitiful role of loose-hanging ornaments or bricks for the great man's pedestal. One could say that,

[11] Shulz-Rhein 1973: 107-108.

[12] Apart from the books written by Chasles senior and junior, also influential in the comparative study of literature was Hippolyte Adolphe Taine's *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (*History of English Literature*, 1863), as well as the monographs produced by the best-known 19th century French Shakespearean scholar, Alfred Mézières, *Shakespeare, ses oeuvres et ses critiques* (*Shakespeare, His Works and His Critics*) (1859) and *Prédécesseurs et contemporains de Shakespeare* (*The Predecessors and Contemporaries of Shakespeare*) (1861). Mézières also wrote a work on Petrarch (1868).

> on the contrary, in the last years the milieu surrounding the protagonist is notably pushed into the foreground and no longer merely sets off the great man, but explains him, while also – to a significant degree – being explained by him. (Veselovsky 2005: 52)

WORLD LITERATURE

While Villemain was holding classes in comparative literature at the Sorbonne, Goethe was talking about *Weltliteratur* ("world literature") in Weimar. Although Goethe's conception of world literature shares some similarities with Villemain's ideas of comparative literature, it is much more universal. It is also more relevant today: it is no exaggeration to say that it is often at the heart of contemporary discussions of comparative literature, and is the subject of many, sometimes disparate interpretations. This can be explained by the fact that Goethe, when speaking of *Weltliteratur*, did not put forward a coherent definition of this idea; towards the end of his life, in conversations with Eckermann, letters, and diary entries, Goethe considered world literature more as an afterthought, in connection with other things.[13] Eckermann, in an entry dated 31 January 1827, notes how Goethe had remarked to him that he had recently been reading a lot, and was particularly drawn to "a Chinese novel", which "seemed very remarkable", primarily because, in contrast to what might be expected of a work that had come from an entirely different civilization, its people "think, act and feel almost exactly like us".

[13] Goethe's best-known pronouncements on world literature were collected into a special appendix by Fritz Srtich, in *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (*Goethe and Weltliteratur*) 1946. One of the most authoritative contemporary discussions of this idea of Goethe's can be found in John Pizer's works, *The Idea of World Literature* (Pizer 2006) and, "Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe: Origins and Relevance of *Weltliteratur*" (D'haen, Damrosch & Kadir, 2011).

Of course, though there are differences, "all they do", Goethe says, "is more clear, more pure, and decorous than with us … without great passion or poetic flight". What is more, nature is portrayed differently, "day is always serene and sunny, the night is always clear", and love is much more reverent and chaste (Eckermann 1970: 182).[14]

As an antithesis to the Chinese novel, Goethe gives the example of Béranger's poems, "which have, almost every one, some immoral licentious subject for their foundation, and which would be extremely odious to me if managed by a genius inferior to Béranger". Developing the comparison between the Chinese novel and Béranger's poems, Goethe then elevates his observations to a more universal plane: "I am more and more convinced," he continues, "that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men. One makes it a little better than another … – that is all." In other words, there is not just one, single universal idea of beauty; beauty can be poetically described and depicted in myriad ways. No single person, no single nation has an absolute claim on poetry. Poetry is "the universal possession of mankind", Goethe says, "revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men." Poetry and beauty can be found in the "moral and proper" descriptions of amorous passions in the Chinese novel, as well as in "a highly remarkable contrast" to it, in the "licentious" poems of Béranger. The two are aesthetically equal. Goethe says: "Herr von Matthisson must not think he is the man, nor must I think that I am the man; but each must say to himself, that the gift of poetry is by no means so very rare, and that nobody need think very much of himself because he has written a good poem."

[14] In the following two paragraphs, all of the quotes from Eckermann are taken from Eckermann 1970: 182-186.

At this point, Goethe redirects the conversation and addresses the limitations of his environment: "But, really, we Germans are very likely to fall too easily into this pedantic conceit, when we do not look beyond the narrow circle which surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach." Goethe considers that the antidote to the self-absorption that results from narrow-mindedness is to read the works of other national literatures to study that which traverses the borders of a single literature, which he refers to here as "world literature".

He maintains that even though foreign literature is to be read, and its novel traits enjoyed, this does not necessarily mean that such literature is to be emulated. What is to be taken as a model is not "anything in particular … the Chinese, or the Servian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen"; for the pattern that we are to emulate, "we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented." So, only the ancient Greeks are exceptions to the course of history, only their art remains universal and beautiful in every age because in it "the beauty of mankind is … represented"; everything else should be viewed historically, that is, relatively: the art of every nation is beautiful within the context of a particular time and place. Goethe's understanding of world literature reflects the Romantic idea of historical relativism. Every poet takes a different approach to writing poetry, "one makes it a little better than another", therefore the "particular", relative value of other poets is not to be regarded as a model. But the idea of world literature can help us "look at" all kinds of literary works "historically" and so "appropriat[e] to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes". In other words, world literature is a collection of the best and most valuable literary

works of different nations. Goethe's claim, viewed in the context of the passage in which he speaks of the Chinese novel, Béranger, and then of himself as the author of *Tasso* and *Iphigenia*, suggests that the best works are those that are *representative* of their respective national literatures. Through their unique narrative style, depictions of nature, and amorous accounts, they express the spirit of the nation and age that produced them. On the basis of these views, it could be said that Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, like Villemain's vision of a Europe united by culture, is as political as it is cultural. On the world market, A nation's cultural products are distinguished on the world market not only by its customs and costumes, but also by its poetry, and "we" are to "appropriate" the greatest of these works and view them as "world literature" belonging to all humanity. The works that comprise world literature are not only "particular: to and representative of the nations they come from, but are also universal because they point to common human values and experiences, like Goethe demonstrated through the example of the Chinese novel, in which people "think, act, and feel almost exactly like us".

Whereas contemporary approaches to world literature often boil down to what Auerbach describes as "world-culture being … standardized", Goethe's approach differs with respect to two key aspects. First, rather than considering world literature to be comprised of thematically and stylistically standardized cookie-cutter works, Goethe considers it to be characterized by diversity, such that the singular, universal essence of mankind is always exhibited in different ways. Second, in terms of aesthetic values, his understanding of world literature can be described as elitist. Though he had realized even in his day that popular literature, which is to say "whatever pleases the masses", would quickly spread throughout the world, Goethe believed that only the best and most valuable works should enter the canon of world

literature, so today he is called by some, in the politically correct jargon of contemporary theory, a "traditionalist" (Pizer 2014: 7).

At the time of its inception, Goethe's idea of world literature was not widely received in Germany, which is to say that it did not give rise to the systematic comparative study of different world or at least European literatures. Although Herder's comparison of early German and English poetry, like Lessing's observations of the character of French and English theatre, could already be understood as true examples of comparative literary study, more than half a century had to pass before the comparative study of literature was accepted as a legitimate literary-historical discipline in Germany. The German term *vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* (*the comparative history of literature*) appeared only in the 1880s, coined by a certain Hungarian, Hugo von Meltzl, known as Meltzl de Lomnitz, and in a distant German periphery – in Transylvanian Klausenburg, which is today Cluj, in Romania. Meltzl was the editor and publisher of the world's first periodical devoted to comparative literature, *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum* (*Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literatur*), that is, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, as he renamed its final issues (1877-88).[15]

Meltzl's work in comparative literature had been forgotten until it drew the interest of David Damrosch, who reviewed it in one of his works (Damrosch: 2006). Damrosch writes that Meltzl, anticipating issues central to contemporary comparative literature, advocated the reform of literary history "through an extensive application of the

[15] In the beginning, the main title of the periodical was Hungarian, *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*, and the subtitle was in German. From 1879, the main title appeared in Latin, with a German subtitle in small print beneath it. Meltlz started up the periodical with an older colleague, Samuel Brassai, who was a professor of mathematics, Sanskrit, and comparative philology, but he mostly edited all of the contributions himself, and from 1882, he was the sole editor.

comparative principle", and criticized the nationalism and exclusivity of "great" European nations, promoting instead multiple languages, or "polyglottism", as the standard for literary studies (Meltzl 1973: 56-62). Meltzl's comparative principle implied a broadening of interests in two directions: towards the masterpieces of great, non-European cultures, China for example, and towards a systematic study of the literature of "small" European nations. In that spirit, Meltzl announced that *Acta comparationis* would print texts in ten "official languages" and included in the editorial board experts from more than a dozen countries, including India, Japan, Egypt, and Australia.

Although he took issue with literary history for being "ancilla historiae politicae", i.e. at the service of the national interests of great nations, not even Meltzl's own conception of the comparative study of literature was free from political and national overtones. To the contrary, it was far more political than literary, having emerged from the fight for the independence and recognition of small nations in middle, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, and having sought the awakening and affirmation of national consciousness through literature. Damrosch correctly notes that the ultimate, thinly veiled objective of Meltzl's comparative literature project was to promote Hungarian literature. In examining *Acta comparationis*, Damrosch comes to the conclusion that Meltzl did not consistently realize his main goals: polyglottism, universality, and the equal representation of "small" languages and literatures. Most of the texts he published were written in German and Hungarian (in Damrosch's estimation, they constitute 70 per cent of the articles published), while the remainder were in French, English, and Italian, with a few short items in Latin (Damrosch 2006: 108). That is a far cry from the ten "official languages" of universal comparative literature. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* was thus

more like a soapbox from which Meltzl promoted Hungarian literature on the world stage. To that end, he brought in a large number of contributions on Hungarian folk literature, but by far the largest number of texts was devoted to Sandor Petöfi, whom he considered not only the greatest Hungarian poet but also the embodiment of the spirit of the Hungarian people. Inspired by patriotic pride, Meltzl wanted to show that the Hungarian people also had something to boast of: a poet who "deserved a prominent place at the table of world literature" (Damrosch 2006: 108). When it comes to literary pride, patriotism is not exclusive to "great" cultures.

That said, there has been a renewed interest in Meltzl's conception of comparative literature because of its universal claims – termed by contemporary theory as a focus on globalism and marginalized ethnic groups and peoples – particularly among those who seek to rethink the traditional Eurocentric comparative canon and transform comparative literature into a "laboratory for exploration at the margins". But during his lifetime, fate did not favor his ideas. And despite his efforts as editor, no more than 100 copies of *Acta comparationis* reached readers worldwide even at its peak circulation, declining thereafter. Finally, the journal's fate justifies Meltzl's criticism of the hegemonic arrogance of "great" cultures. *Acta comparationis* was snuffed out by a disloyal competitor, a German journal *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, which in 1886 in Berlin was launched by Max Koch, a professor at the University of Marburg and one of the first German comparatists. Koch's *Zeitschrift* was issued until 1910, totaling eighteen numbers, though the last four were not edited by Koch himself. In 1901, he launched a second, similar journal, *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* which, like *Zeitschrift*, mostly featured articles on folklore and thematological problems. No sooner had the German rival journal appeared than Meltzl expressed his suspicion that this new

and better-placed journal with a similar title had been founded to "siphon off" readers from his journal (Damroch 2006: 109). But to no avail: just two years later, Meltzl was forced to discontinue his journal.[16] The articles in Koch's journal were written entirely in German, and most of the print space was devoted to German literature, which Koch regarded as a conduit for European literature.

Such a view of German literature and where it stood in relation to other European and world literatures also marked the decades of German literary scholarship that followed, through the end of the 20th century. What is more, comparative literature never became a distinct scientific discipline or academic subject in Germany. When Horst Oppel was asked by the American Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature in 1958 to give an overview of the state of comparative literary study in Germany, he wrote that it was almost nonexistent in German academic life. Pointing to the scarce examples of comparative studies in the 18th and 19th centuries, he claims that, "By the end of the [19th] century the concern with so-called 'national literature' had made it almost impossible to see German literature in a European context. The result was, as Matthew Arnold termed it, 'a provincial judgment.'" Apart from that, "The systematization of teaching in German universities during the second half of the nineteenth century left no room for Comparative Literature as an independent subject" and the consequences of such an academic system, Oppel writes, "can still be felt today", in all of Western Germany (Oppel 1958: 16). Barring the very popular *Stoffgeschichte* approach, German comparative literature was largely philological: focusing on a text and its

[16] Since 1973 the Hungarian Academy of Science has been publishing a journal that continues the tradition of Meltlz's *Zeitschrift*, and as such has a symbolic and very similar title, *Neohelicon: Acta comparationis literarum universarum*.

linguistic and stylistic characteristics. By contrast to comparative literary studies in France which, as Veselovsky writes, were geared towards "the material of general education", comparative literary studies in Germany were narrowly specialized, requiring specific and often esoteric philological knowledge. Veselovsky, in his introductory lecture on *The History of World Literature*, describes how "general literature" was taught at the University of Berlin:

> In Germany, as is well-known, departments of world literature exist as departments of Romance and Germanic philology. The name of 'philology' by itself well conveys the character of these departments. A professor reads [with his students] some Old French, Old German, or Provencal texts (you will note that predominantly old texts are involved). First, a brief summary of grammatical rules is provided: paradigms of declensions and conjugations, and (if the text is in verse) distinctive metrical features are dictated. Then the actual reading of an author follows, accompanied by philological and literary commentary. In this fashion one reads the *Edda*, *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungen[lied]* and the *Song of Roland*. (Veselovsky 2005: 50)

The academic status of comparative literature in Germany remains largely unchanged to this day. With the exception of the Institute for General and Comparative Literary Studies at the Free University in Berlin, which was founded after the Second World War primarily for political reasons and backed by American comparatists, comparative studies in Germany has received almost no institutional support. In a work on comparative literature in Germany today, Jelena Volić writes that comparative literary study there usually involves the comparison of German literature with other "great" European literatures, "primarily French and Italian" (Volić 2005: 155-156). As such, the purpose of such study rests not on the comparison of two literatures or the consideration of phenomena that transcend the borders

of German literature, but on none but German literature, which Germanists and German 'comparatists' frequently attempt to present as philosophically or linguistically dominant.[17] It can thus seem strange that two of the most important works in comparative literature in the 20th century, Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* and Auerbach's *Mimesis*, emerged from German literary studies. However, considering that Ernst Robert Curtius and Auerbach were both trained in Romance languages and literatures, their interest in the comparative study of literature is understandable. What is more, Curtius and Auerbach were classically trained philologists and had mastered multiple modern languages, which naturally led them to the comparative study of different European and world literatures.

By contrast, aspects of the history of comparative literature as an academic discipline in England support the line of thought often voiced by comparatists that because it is the "great" nations and literatures that tend to suffer from provincialism, the study of world literature would find the most fertile ground in the "small" and "marginalized" nations which lack the bias of having a globally influential languages and cultures (Wells 1952: 29). The renowned poet and great 19th century English critic Matthew Arnold is usually credited with having ushered in the comparative study of literature to the English-speaking world, and it is also he who set the fashion of lambasting the provincialism

[17] Volić 2005: 155-156. Jelena Volić's work is particularly interesting because it deals with the status of comparative literature and, more generally, the study of literature in Germany after the Second World War, which has been in the "process of regaining the right to a national identity". In her opinion, the fate of "general literature in Germany [is] essentially connected to the fate of German studies after the Second World War", which was itself determined by "the political impetus to reexamine German studies and Germanists" imposed by the United States and its Western allies: "In Germany, general literature directly emerged from the struggle to cope with the Nazi history of German studies." (Volić 2005: 155-156)

of a "great" nation like England. However, the first comparative literary study was in fact published by Henry Hallam: in 1837 the first of the four tomes of his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe, in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* was printed.[18] In Baroque style reminiscent of Chasles, Hallam writes in the preface to his history of European literature that, "the advantage of such a synoptical view of literature as displays its various departments in their simultaneous condition through an extensive period, and in their mutual dependency, seem too manifest to be disputed".[19] But, as Frederick Roe writes, that approach remained unused until "the parochialism of the post-Hallam generation" impelled Matthew Arnold to reproach critics' readiness to assume "that in literature, as in industry, Englishmen were 'the best breed in the world'" (Roe 1954:1). In Arnold's opinion, their delusion was inexcusable given the numerous English translations of German, French, and Italian works that had been appearing since the early 19th century (Roe 1954: 1-2).

In the first of his *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Arnold warns critics that "England is not all the world", so "much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign". According to Arnold, the critic must regard, "Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result" (Arnold n.d., 29). That outcome is achieved by nurturing the human capacity for creative and intellectual effort mostly through poetry, as Arnold has it. He thus urges poets and critics to read the

[18] The last tome was printed in 1839. Understanding the idea of "literature" in accordance with the spirit of his time to mean all that which is the product of writing and scholarship and not just the "belletristic", Hallam writes not only about the history of European literature but also philosophy, the natural sciences, and medicine, as well as general history and theology.

[19] Cited in Roe 1954: 1.

poetry of different nations and above all to read the works of classical Greek poets like Homer, Sophocles, and Pindar which, due to their simplicity, harmoniousness, and total effect, he deems superior to modern poetry. Alongside the Greeks, Arnold also had a deep respect for Goethe because of his cosmopolitanism, intellectual depth, and emotional restraint. This is worthy of note because Arnold's general attitude towards European literature influenced the writing of T. S. Eliot. That influence was evident throughout Eliot's career, and in his essay "What Is a Classic?", in which he tacitly polemicizes with Arnold while ostensibly setting out the distinction between relative and absolute classics, comparing Goethe with Virgil in this respect.

The term *comparative literature* was first coined in English by Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, an Irish lawyer and professor of Classics and English literature in Auckland, New Zealand, who used it as the title of his 1886 work, *Comparative Literature*.[20] In a work published fifteen years later, Posnett confesses that he was not entirely satisfied with this term, but stresses that there is no equivalent in English for the German word *Literaturwissenschaft* that could be used to replace the phrase *literary studies*. From this it can also be seen that Posnett's term *comparative literature* in fact means the comparative study of literature (Posnett 1973: 183-206). Unlike Arnold, who held traditional humanistic views, Posnett espoused Darwinism and was a proponent of applying the methods of natural science to the study of literature. Following Hippolyte Taine's methodological trinity of literary history (*race*, *milieu*, *moment*), he defined the three "fundamental principles" of comparative literature as

[20] Before him, the expression "comparative literatures" was used by Matthew Arnold in a letter dating May 1848 (see Roe 1954: 6). In Serbia, Vladislava Ribnikar has written about Posnett's idea of comparative literature, see Marčetić – Popović, "Ideja uporednog proučavanja književnosti u Velikoj Britaniji" ("The Idea of the Comparative Study of Literature in Great Britain", 2005: 142-153).

the study of, "social evolution, individual evolution, and the influence of the environment on the social and individual life of man" (Posnett 1973: 188). Posnett was a great collector of facts, and he devoted a large portion of his book to Indian, Chinese, and Arab literature, as well as to the cultures of the classical Mediterranean and modern Europe. Independent of similar research conducted by Veselovsky in Russia, Posnett sought the correlations between literary and social development in a global framework and devoted equal attention to folk literature and literary masterpieces. Like Meltzl, he was opposed to the centralizing cosmopolitanism of "great" cultures. Posnett and Meltzl's comparative literature projects are also similar in that they both experienced a renaissence in contemporary comparative literature which, as has been established, marks a radical departure from traditional "Eurocentric" comparative literature.

Not even later in the 20th century was there any real interest in comparative literary study in Great Britain. The first teaching post for comparative literature in England was established as late as 1953 at the University of Manchester, while independent departments for comparative literary study did not appear before the 1970s. In the words of Vladislava Ribnikar, these years were "nonetheless stimulating for the development of British comparative literature", because the British Comparative Literature Association was established at that time (1975) and began issuing a journal, *Comparative Criticism* (Ribnikar 2005: 149). A few years, later, in the 1980s, Susan Bassnett, one of the most prominent comparatists in the UK and the author of the only British textbook of comparative literature[21] founded the Center for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick. (The Center was closed in 2009.)

[21] *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction (1993).*

ROOTLESS COSMOPOLITANS

The emergence of comparative literature in Russia, i.e. the Soviet Union, was particularly tumultuous and, if it can be so phrased, interesting. By general consensus, the greatest Russian comparatist was Veselovsky. But Veselovsky was a special kind of comparatist, and the approach he took to the study of comparative literature set him apart from his Western counterparts. Veselovsky considered the term *influence*, originating in French comparative literature and ubiquitous in the West, to be too narrow, and formulated his own comparative method on similarities or analogies reached through comparative-historical grammar and comparative mythology, which were at that time newly established scientific fields. In this way, the comparison of different phenomena was not based on influences or borrowing, but on analogous general evolutionary laws. Veselovsky sought those laws in literature, taking as the object of study all of world literature which, in addition to West European and Russian and other East European literatures, also included Indian and Oriental literatures.

Veselovsky developed a comparative method that he called "historical poetics". Endeavoring to discover the laws that have governed the evolution of literature from prehistory to the present, he studied the development of stylistic and compositional devices such as epithets and epic repetition, as well as entire poetic genres – from ritual poetry through Greek myth to Bernart de Ventadorn, Goethe, and Heine.[22] Veselovsky's research into the ancient sources of poetry is not only significant to the study of literary history but also to the comparative study of literature given that, as would

[22] Veselovsky's most important work in this area is "Три главы из исторической поэтики" ("Three Chapters of Historical Poetics") (1898).

also be true of Curtius' landmark book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, it reveals certain literary constants, themes, motifs, and compositional techniques that 'travel' through time and the literatures of different peoples. Of course, there are some important differences between these two works: Curtius studied *topoi* and other constants only within the context of West European and classical Greek and Roman literature, while Veselovsky sought them within a global framework. What is more, by contrast to Curtius, Veselovsky believed that the subject of comparative literature should not be limited to the belletristic, but include all written texts, without discrimination:

> I believe that neither the Provencal *Elucidarius* nor the didactic treatise about hunting birds or the instructions of the jongleur should be excluded from any [historical] observation. All this also belongs to the history of literature, though it does not have the pretense to be called poetry. To separate such works would be as inappropriate as if someone conceived of limiting the study of Dante to a poetic economy of *The Divine Comedy* and ceding historical allusions, medieval cosmonogy, and theological debates in paradise to the specialists.[23]

Because of such and similar claims, Veselovsky's "general history of literature" appears slightly outmoded today, although it undoubtedly has its merits. In accordance with the spirit of his time, Veselovsky saw the history of world literature as part of a larger *Kulturgeschichte* and was convinced that a nation's literature could not be properly understood without prior knowledge of the identity and distinctiveness of that nation: without previously having "live[d] one's way into it" and "become acclimated" to it, i.e. without having "become one with" that nation both historically and culturally (Veselovsky 2005: 477). Historicism of

[23] Veselovsky, "From the Reports on a Mission Abroad" (1863), Veselovsky 2005: 475.

this kind in literary scholarship has long been behind the times, and one of its most serious shortcomings, from which Veselovsky's method also suffers, is that it does not offer any *evaluative* criteria that would differentiate texts that are legitimate subjects for comparative study from texts that are not. The truth of the matter is, however, that such cultural-historical ideas are characteristic of Veselovsky's early works; in his later and most important works, he moved his focus to literary-theoretical questions.[24]

Comparative literary study of the kind Veselovsky began in "Three Chapters from the Historical Poetics" and continued in his last work, the unfinished *Поэтика сюжетов* (*Poetics of Plots*, 1897-1906) did not, either in Russia or later in the Soviet Union, attract the attention it undoubtedly deserves.[25] On the contrary, as we shall see, among the casualties of one of the most thorough purges of "bourgeois" scholarship and scholars was not only Veselovsky but all of the comparatists who supported him, as well as the comparative method that he used, which, in terms of its innovativeness and theoretical soundness, clearly surpassed the methodology used in Western European comparative literature at that time. For that very reason some of Veselovsky's ideas, even when they were being contested, significantly influenced the Russian formalist theory of prose, which itself influenced some of the most significant research on narrative structure in the literary-theoretical thought of the second half of the 20th century.[26]

[24] Victor Erlich writes that Veselovsky's theoretical thought "evolved from the history of culture to the history of poetics" (Erlich 1959: 34).

[25] With the exception of the work undertaken by Viktor Zhirmunsky to continue Veselovsky's research, which will be addressed later.

[26] For example, in the research of the French narratologists assembled in the journal *Communications*: Barthes, Genette, Todorov, Claude Bremond and others, or in Lévi-Strauss's study of myth.

The most important was the concept of *motif*, which Veselovsky defined in *Poetics of Plots* as "the simplest narrative unit", and the concept of *syuzhet*,[27] which Veselovsky understood as a "series" or "grouping" of motifs. It is common knowledge that Viktor Shklovsky drew from this understanding of *motif* the distinction he established between *fabula*[28] and *syuzhet*, key concepts not only in his work but also in the formalist theory of prose. Propp in the *Morphology of the Folktale*, departing from the concept of *motif* as the smallest narrative unit, describes the folktale as a collection of motifs unified through common *syuzhet*. But more importantly, in the later development of the theory of prose, in both formalism and structuralism, Shklovsky and Propp understood *syuzhet*, in accordance with Veselovsky, as a compositional and not merely topical category, which enabled them to regard narrative text from new formalist and structuralist perspectives.

A particular aspect of Veselovsky's work, the paradigm of literary comparatism formulated on analogy, which is to say on the "influences" in national literatures that cannot be explained by either contact relations or common origin, had a significant impact on Viktor Zhirmunsky. In the late 1930s, departing from Veselovsky's idea that the law-like "regularity" of literary "facts" becomes apparent through their recurrence among different peoples in similar historical conditions, Zhirmunsky formulated a theory of the "stadialism" of historico-literary development based on what he emphasized as "the Marxist conception of the historical process".[29] World literature was for Zhirmunsky, as it was for Veselovsky, not the mere assemblage of national literatures but an organic whole

[27] i.e., *сюжет*: plot, discourse or theme.
[28] i.e., *фабула*: story.
[29] Cited in Struve 1955:13.

composed of different phenomena that develop according to specific socio-historical laws. Zhirmunsky posits that the analogies Veselovsky wrote about – namely the similarities between different and sometimes very distant literatures that cannot be explained through their direct interaction or genetic links – emerge in respective cultures during similar stages of socio-historical development. In other words, cultures at similar stages of development produce literature with similar features (motifs, themes, stylistic and compositional devices), and all of the analogies that exist in those literatures independently of direct interaction occur because of similar social conditions. For example, the analysis of analogous literary phenomena could, according to Zhirmunsky, solve an old problem in comparative literature: the similarities between the poetry of the troubadours and minnesingers on the one hand, and the Arabic "love poetry" that is similar but significantly predates them on the other. Because the similarities between these geographically and temporally distant literatures could not be explained by the theory of influence, the solution had to be in stadialism: according to Zhirmunsky, the types of poetry in question are similar because they all emerged in feudal societies – that is, in similar historical conditions.

But Zhirmunsky did himself no favors by founding his theory of stadialism on a Marxist understanding of the historical process and by suggesting that the development of the comparative method in the USSR would enhance the reputation and preeminence of Soviet scholarship over the narrowly specialized field in the West. As early as the 1930s, the comparative study of literature in the Soviet Union was not viewed favorably by the authorities and that animosity became increasingly pronounced over time so that, with the first signs of the Cold War in August 1946, it culminated in a veritable witch-hunt under the iron fist of the rule of

Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.[30]

Struve writes in a work which is still relevant today that during the period of Zhdanovism, "comparativism became a term of abuse, and those practicing it in literary scholarship of literary criticism, became guilt of a mortal sin" (Struve 1955: 2). Not even orthodox Marxists were spared such attacks. For example, Isaac Nusinov, one of the most prominent representatives of the socialist regime became the subject of criticism because of his book *Пушкин и мировая литература* (*Pushkin and World Literature*) (1941), which he had written six years earlier. Alexander Fadeyev, the chairman of the Union of Soviet Writers, accused Nusinov of "kowtowing to the West", representing Russian realism as a mere appendage to West European literature and trivializing Pushkin's uniqueness, simply because Nusinov's work indicated that Pushkin had employed universal literary themes, motifs, and images.

[30] In his works devoted to this dark episode (Struve 1955; 1957; 1959), Gleb Struve distinguishes three periods in Soviet literary scholarship, which also determined the fate of comparative literary scholarship. The first period lasted from 1917-1929, and was marked by relative freedom. At that time, literary theorists, together with other scholars, did not have to be Marxists; what is more, differences were tolerated among Marxists themselves. Some of the most important works by Russian formalists appeared at that time; however, they soon became targets of constant attack and were barred from doing further theoretical work. The second period encompassed the thirties and the first half of the forties (although a certain "thaw" occurred during wartime). This period is known as the age of "socialist realism" in literature and art in general. The formalist method was practically forbidden, and the study of literature was permitted only if consistent with Marxist doctrine. Finally, the third, ugliest period began in August 1946 with the adoption of the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which sought the total eradication of all traces of bourgeois mentality in Soviet literature, and especially the spirit of "subservience to the capitalist West". Andrei Zhdanov, the secretary of the Central Committee, was responsible for the implementation of these resolutions, thence the appellation of this several-year period as "Zhdanovism".

According to Fadeyev, all the "passportless tramps" and "rootless cosmopolitans", who deferred to West European values and had no ties with Marxism, were Veselovsky's disciples and students. Though Fadeyev conceded that Veselovsky had played an important role in Russian literary, philological, and linguistic scholarship, he nonetheless accused Veselovsky of departing from the great Russian revolutionary democratic tradition[31] by having replaced Marxist materialism and "real" historicism with "worthless liberal-positivistic methods". Fadeyev's attack on Veselovsky triggered a ruthless campaign against the "survivors of Veselovsky's school" (Struve 1955: 4), among whom were some of the greatest names of Russian literary scholarship: Vladimir Propp, Boris Eikhenbaum, Leonid Grossman, Shklovsky, Zhirmunsky, etc. All of them were accused of "Veselovskyism", i.e. "bourgeois liberalism", "cosmopolitanism", and "comparativism" in literary history and criticism. In March 1948, the journal *Culture and Life*, an organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, published in an editorial titled "Against Bourgeois Liberalism in Literary Scholarship", a denunciation of "Veselovskyists", and took issue with some of their earlier critics for having been too lax towards them.

It goes without saying that from an intellectual standpoint most of the accusations against comparative literature were tragicomic and absurd. For example, the authors of the first volume of the Soviet Academy of Sciences publication *История французской литературы* (*The History of French Literature*), who represented some of the leading experts in that field of Soviet scholarship, were criticized for drawing attention to the influence of French writers (Boileau, Molière, La Fontaine, etc.) on 18th century Russian

[31] The most significant proponents of this early Marxist criticism in Russia in the 19th century were Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and Nikolai Dobrolyubov.

literature. Similar criticism was directed at the editors and authors of *История английской литературы* (*The History of English Literature*), who were also experts in this field, because they – obviously correctly – wrote that Swift, Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne had influenced Russian authors. Eikhenbaum, the author of one of the best works on Tolstoy, became the target of sharp criticism because he wrote that Tolstoy had been inspired by Schopenhauer's philosophy, and Grossman was censured for identifying multiple Oriental and Biblical motifs in Ljermontov's poetry. Still, the work that possibly fared the worst was Propp's *The History of the Root of Fables*, which one of the most impassioned Marxist critics, Tarasenkov, wrote reminded him more of a "London or Berlin telephone directory than a scholarly publication of the Leningrad University" (only because Propp cited Western folklorists and anthropologists like Frazer, Levi-Brilles, Boas, Kroeber, Frobenius, etc.) (Struve 1955: 9).

By contrast, 'reverse comparative literature', which is to say the study of the impact of Russian, and Soviet literature in particular, on American and European literature, was encouraged. For example, Soviet scholars studied how Maxim Gorky had influenced Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and Theodore Dreiser, and Grossman was allowed to publish, in Struve's words, "an insignificant article about the influence of Mayakovsky on Louis Aragon" (Struve 2005:9). It was also permissible to write about Tolstoy's influence on Romain Rolland, as well as the influence of Russian writers on the literature that emerged from the so-called "people's democracy", i.e. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

The assault on comparatists and the study of comparative literature reached a culminating point in the spring of 1948, a few months before Zhdanov's death, when the "flower[s]

of Soviet literary scholarship" (Struve 1955: 10) were made to mount the dais in the Leningrad University amphitheater and publicly renounce their "'comparativist' errors" before the crowded auditorium. Leading that file of the repentant was Propp, and behind him, one after another, Zhirmunsky, Eikhenbaum, Arkady Dolinin, Grigory Zhukovsky, and Mikhail Alekseyev approached the rostrum. As they had been unable to attend in person, Boris Tomashevsky, Mark Azadovsky, Vasily Alekseyevic Desnitsky, and Vladimir Shishmaryov sent letters of repentance. At the Leningrad University meeting,[32] a unanimous resolution was adopted according to which Veselovsky was proclaimed a typical representative of "bourgeois-liberal academic scholarship" and his method "diametrically opposed to Marxism", and which stated that "formalism and bourgeois cosmopolitanism are inseparable from Veselovsky's teaching" (Struve 1955: 10). Shishmaryov, Zhirmunsky, Alekseyev, and Azadovsky were proclaimed "active partisans", and the rest – including both Eikhenbaum and Tomashevsky, their "abettors". Struve writes that the true significance of these glaringly preposterous charges directed against the University of Leningrad's most eminent scholars and professors can be inferred from a statement Zhirmunsky read at the meeting: "I have in mind in the first place liberal-bourgeois cosmopolitanism in scholarship which – at least in the past – appeared to politically nearsighted people to be just an innocent pastime of abstract learning, but which, used demagogically by present-day American imperialists, has revealed itself as a real threat to the freedom and national independence of the peoples of the world."[33]

[32] According to Struve, similar meetings were held at other universities in the Soviet Union. A detailed report of this meeting was published in *Литературная газета* (*Literary Gazette*), 18 November 1948 (Struve 1955:10).

[33] Cited in Struve 1955: 10.

Struve concludes his work, published in 1955, with the remark that following the public 'trial' of comparatists at the University of Leningrad, almost nothing could be learned of what became of them. Today we know that soon after the 'trial', they were all purged from the university and forbidden to publish or do research. Their names were removed from literature and references to their works vanished from footnotes and citations. For example, that same year, Grigory Gukovsky, one of the leading specialists in 18th century Russian literature, was charged with "bourgeois cosmopolitanism" and brought to the NKVD's infamous investigative isolator for the detainment of political prisoners, where he died in 1950.

When Struve published his work, he could not have known either the fate of the unfortunate Veselovskyists or that there would be a radical change in political direction in the Soviet Union immediately following Stalin's death in the spring of 1953, and comparative literary study would again find itself in the midst of political ferment.[34] In September 1955 an editorial was published in the journal of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, *Вопросы истории* (*Questions of History*) in which Soviet literary historians were accused of "falsifying", "idealizing", and "modernizing" the history of literature, in other words, for reducing research to "falsely conceived political interests". Identified among the greatest shortcomings of postwar Soviet literary scholarship was the tendency to isolate Russian literature and Russian thought in general from the intellectual currents of West Europe and America. As was standard practice in the communist regime, the editorial was understood as a "directive": those who had been the loudest opponents of comparative literature were suddenly vying to defend such research. Veselovsky and Velesovskyists were promptly

[34] Struve writes about this change a few years later (Struve 1957 and 1959).

rehabilitated, and one of them, Desnitsky, was permitted to publicly address the harm done to Soviet literary scholarship through the "erroneous conception of 'cosmopolitanism'" and total disregard for the ties between Russian and other European literatures (Struve 1957: 8). But this did not mean that comparatists enjoyed the full confidence of the communist authorities: their return to scholarly life was permitted only under strict supervision. For example, in September 1958, the Department of Literature and Languages of the Soviet Academy of Sciences released a memorandum prescribing the topics and tasks of comparative literary study. Some of the prewar comparatists who had been purged from university positions, such as Alekseyev and Zhirmunsky, assisted in compiling the memorandum, but project leadership was entrusted to Ivan Anisimov, who had been one of the most vocal opponents of "bourgeois" comparative literature. Struve considers that this change in course, just like the preceding reversal when comparatists had been put in the pillory, was entirely due to political reasons – specifically de-Stalinization and the adoption of the "new look"[35] doctrine in Soviet foreign policy (Struve 1957: 10).

Unfortunately, after the great start Russian comparative literature made through the works of Veselovsky, Zhirmunsky, Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky, and Propp, it never recovered from the effects of the Zhdanovian purges. In the late 20th century, like in the first decade of this century, comparative literary studies in America and Western Europe had an indisputable advantage, not only in terms of academic influence but also in terms of methodological value. Although individual Soviet historians and literary theorists began as early as the 1960s to show an interest

[35] Together with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower referred to the more moderate policies adopted following the death of Stalin as the Soviets' "new look" – which is to be distinguished from the "New Look" policy Eisenhower instituted.

in West European, American, and world literature at large (Struve 1959: 17), the only substantial comparative literary project in the USSR was the publication of *История всемирной литературы в девяти томах* (*The History of World Literature in Nine Volumes*), under the auspices of the Gorky Institute of World Literature. The project began in 1983 but remained unfinished due to the fall of the USSR; the last, eighth, volume was published in 1994, (D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir 2014: xix).

A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS OR RACE

While comparative literature was on the road to recovery in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death, on the other side of the iron curtain, in the United States, it was having its heyday. In December 1958, celebrating seventy-five years of comparative literature at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, Henri Peyre stated that comparative literature in the United States had become one of the most popular academic disciplines: more comparative literature professorships had been allocated in America than in all of the countries in the world combined, comparative literature departments at American universities had enviable budgets at their disposal, and top students in America were competing to enroll in comparative literature courses (Peyre 1959: 19). But Peyre considered the most conclusive indication of the vitality of American comparative literature to be the fact that comparative literature in America had successfully gained independence from its European teachers and formulated a distinct comparative method. This period in American comparative literature will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter; here, just a few words will be devoted to the very beginnings of comparative literature as an academic discipline in the United States.

Harvard houses the oldest and one of the most elite comparative literature departments in America. It was founded in 1904 when the department was entrusted to the leadership of William Henry Schofield, a professor of Old Norse. But according to Renato Poggioli, instruction in comparative literature actually began in the 1890s when several courses in comparative literature were offered, among which were those taught by Irving Babbitt on literary criticism and the Romantic movement (Poggiolli, 1952: 51-52). Schofield was the founder and editor of *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature*, one of the most important series on comparative literature in the United States, which showcases the work of prominent comparatists from America and beyond. Schofield did not formulate a general theory of comparative literature although he did write a notable work on Chaucer, Malory, Spencer, and Shakespeare (1912). In terms of theory, the most significant early American comparatists were Charles Mills Gayley and George Edward Woodberry.

Gayley sought to remove the "subjective" element and the "speculative" or judicial method from criticism by arguing that comparative literature is a science. He considered the study of influences as but one of the objects of comparative literature, writing that the comparative method should be employed to determine the movements, types, and themes that shape national and international literary development. In Gayley's view, this new science of literature seeks to elucidate the factors that enter into different literatures, but can be just as scientifically comparative if it is used to throw light upon the factors that enter into a single literature and determine the stages of its growth. Finally, Gayley includes as a legitimate field of comparative literature the comparison of folklore (Gayley: 92).

Gayley began as a professor of Latin at Michigan University where, after a year of postgraduate study in

Europe, he became Assistant Professor of English and Rhetoric in 1887. His lectures in English literature were so successful that in 1889, the University of California offered him a position as the head of the English department at Berkeley. A large number of the lectures that Gayley developed or delivered there were comparative in nature, as exemplified by his course on "Great Books", which drew enormous audiences. Later, many American universities introduced courses modeled after Gayley's and under the same title; these courses presented a historical overview of the most representative works of various national literatures, in English.[36]

Gayley's thought was most influenced by Posnett, Taine, and Ferdinand Brunetière. He studied the evolution of literary genres and asked whether Darwin's theory of evolution could help determine the laws of literary development: "If Brunetière would only complete the national portion of his history,[37] or, at least, try to substantiate his theory, we should be grateful. He has, however, enunciated one of the problems with which Comparative Literature must grapple, and is grappling. Does the biological principle apply to literature? If not, in how far may the parallel be scientifically drawn?" (Gayely: 91). Even then, Gayley foresaw that the task set before comparatists – the study of the vast collection of materials constituting the various literatures of the world – far exceeds the capacities of an individual, and thus proposed collective scholarship: "I [have made] a plea for the formation of a Society of Comparative Literature …

[36] Advocating U.S. involvement in the First World War, Gayley changed the name of his course in 1917 to, "Books on the Great War" (Schulz – Rhein 1973: 231).

[37] Gayley was referring to Brunetière's work founded on Darwin's theory of evolution, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la literature*, Vol. I: *L'évolution de la critique depuis la Renaissance jusqu'à nos jours* (*The Evolution of Genres in Literary History, Vol. 1: The evolution of criticism from the Renaissance to modern times*, 1890).

each member of [the association] should devote himself to the study of a given type … with which he was specially and at first hand familiar". In this way, Gayle writes, "by systematization of results, scholarship might attain to the common, and probably some of the essential, characteristics of classified phenomena, to some of the laws actually governing the origin, growth, and differentiation of one and another of the component literary factors and kinds" (Gayley: 84). Because of this idea and his attempt to interpret literature in accordance with Darwin's theory of evolution, Gayley is a forerunner of the paradigm of "new comparative literature" as formulated by Moretti. Because an entire chapter in this book is devoted to Moretti's conception of world literature, it should be noted that it is being mentioned here in connection with Gayley for the express purpose of rectifying a minor injustice: neither Moretti nor his followers nor his critics recognize Gayley's comparative evolution as a precedent to "new literary history", or see in his advocacy of collective scholarship the antecedent to their own perspectives of interdisciplinary comparative literature.

Columbia University can boast of having the first Department of Comparative Literature on the American continent. The department was founded in 1899 but was not as long-lived as that at Harvard; since 1910, it has been merged with the Department of English Language and Literature. Woodberry was the first head of the Department of Comparative Literature at Columbia. Unlike Gayley, who was a theorist, Woodberry was a literary critic, and one with very broad interests at that. He wrote about Coleridge, Browning, Wordsworth, Cervantes, Milton, Vergil, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Tasso, Lucretius, Thackeray, and a host of other authors, his most significant works being those on Poe (1885 and 1909), Swinburne (1905), and Hawthorne (1918). Woodberry believed that with the arrival of the 20th century, a new age would dawn, the age of cosmopolitanism:

"The parts of the world draw together, and with them the parts of knowledge, slowly knitting into that one intellectual state which, above the sphere of politics … will be at last the true bond of all the world." Woodberry writes that this rising state is "without frontiers or race or force"; in it "reason is supreme". The spirit of this new cosmopolitan age is most clearly manifest in the study of comparative literature: "The emergence and growth of the new study known as Comparative Literature are incidental to the coming of this larger world and the entrance of scholars upon its work; the study will run its course, and together with other converging elements goes to its goal in the unity of mankind found in the spiritual unities of science, art and love." (Woodberry 1903: 4)

Woodberry was the editor and one of the founders of the first American journal of comparative literature, *The Journal of Comparative Literature* (1903). Neither the department that he headed nor the journal was long-lived. Though the latter folded for financial reasons after just four issues, Woodberry had succeeded to publish in it works by Benedetto Croce, George Santayana, Pietro Toldo, and Fernand Baldensperger. After the demise of both Woodberry's journal and the independent Department of Comparative Literature at Columbia, a series of lean years set in for the study of comparative literature in America. Apart from a short period in the latter half of the 1920's, when several large and significant comparative literature departments were opened at the universities of North Carolina, South California, and Wisconsin, comparative literature in the United States practically languished until the end of the Second World War. But already in the years immediately following the war's end, a true blossoming of comparative literature ensued, because of which this period, which lasted through the end of the 1980s, is aptly called the golden age of comparative literature in America and beyond.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP

DEBATES ON METHODOLOGY

The study of comparative literature emerged as a distinct discipline on the cusp of the 19th and 20th centuries. At that time, it was commonly understood as a branch of literary history and a bridge between different national literatures. Georg Brandes, Posnett, Brunetière, Joseph Texte, and Croce, among others, each in their own way, wrote of the goals and the methods of the new discipline. Brunetière, for example, saw in comparative literature both a means by which to forge a lasting connection between the great literatures of Europe and a way to chart the similarities between them and trace their development. Texte, the author of a monograph on Rousseau that was considered "the first great book on scientific comparativism" (Guyard 1965: 10),[1] saw the comparative study of literature as the study of international relations and advocated the study of international influences: comparative literature should answer questions

[1] The work in question is Texte's *J.J. Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire* (1895), which explores English-French connections through the example of Rousseau's works.

about "what Racine owed to Sophocles or what Ronsard owed to Pindar" (Texte 1973: 110). The larger disparities among individual authors notwithstanding, two main approaches to the comparative study of literature of that time can be distinguished. The first, which may be called "Villemainian", originated in France and focused on the study of "great" European literatures and the study of international relations. In this version of comparative literature, typical themes include Italian influences on the French Renaissance, German influences on English Romanticism, international borrowings (e.g. Malherbe drawing inspiration from Roman satirists), and the reception of foreign poetry – Virgil in the Middle Ages; Dante, Boccaccio, or Ariosto in France. The second type of study takes as its focus traditional literary themes and motifs, i.e. general types, and is termed *thematology* or *Stoffgeschichte*. As seen through the examples of Meltzl and Koch, thematology has been practiced predominantly by German comparatists, but important research in this field has also been done in Russia (by Veselovsky and later Zhirmunsky), Great Britain (by Posnett) and Italy (by Francesco de Sanctis). Thematology traces the migration of specific literary themes, motifs, characters, genres, and formulas from one nation to another, often with particular emphasis on folklore, because of which it is often criticized for being more a history of folklore than of literature. By contrast to French comparatists who exclusively research concrete influences, thematologists study stylistic-typological similarities that cannot be explained through contact relations. As already mentioned, Zhirmunsky explained stylistic-typological affinities as resulting from similar stages of development in different societies, which led to his theory of stadialism being included in Marxist literary history despite the fact that comparative literature was regarded as an abhorrent "cosmopolitan" and "bourgeois" field of study in the Soviet Union (*Étiemble* 1963: 12-13; Wellek 1965: 289).

Although thematology proved successful in the study of less well-known (e.g. Oriental) literatures, it was limited by its methodology – it did not provide criteria for the interpretation or aesthetic evaluation of literature, which was pointed out very early on by some of its critics.

For example, Croce takes issue with Koch's programmatic text which defines the main topic of comparative literary study as the "development of idea and form", "transformation of similar or related themes", and "mutual influences" of particular literatures (Croce 1973: 220), though he stipulates that it is not his intention to categorically discount such research as it is similar to his own study of the influences of Spanish literature and culture on Italy. Croce nonetheless states that although such study can be of historical significance, it is the most futile of all literary studies:

> If one devotes himself exclusively to such investigations, the *brain* grows weary and experiences what is akin to a sense of emptiness and *vacuum*. From what does such aridity stem? Whence comes this feeling of working in a void? The fact is that such researches as these are to be classified in the category of erudition purely and simply and never lend themselves to an organic treatment. They never lead us by themselves alone to the understanding of a literary work; they never allow us to penetrate into the vital heart and quick of an artistic creation. Their subject is not the esthetic genius of the literary work, but either the external history of the work already formed (successive shifts and changes in development, translation, imitation, etc.) or a fragment of the varied material which has contributed to its formation (literary tradition). The books which are strictly held within the confines of this order of investigation necessarily take on the form of a catalog or of bibliography... There is lacking – and it cannot fail to be lacking – the study of the creative moment, which constitutes the true concern of literary and artistic history. (Croce 1973: 221)

This type of study, according to Croce, is not essential to an understanding of *literature*; literary works should be studied as distinctive and unrepeatable "intuitions", which is to say particular aesthetic facts. For Croce – as well as for Wellek half a century later – comparative literature thus conceived has failed to set out a specific methodology and subject matter, and is thus not an independent field of study, but merely a branch of literary history. However, this does not mean that comparative literature does not have its place: it serves a purpose insofar as it takes as its focus the broader social-historical context from which a literary work emerges, i.e. if it studies "*all* [of its] antecedents … near and far, practical and ideal, philosophical and literary, connected in words or connected in plastic and figurative forms" (Croce 1973: 222). Croce does not deny the importance of a historical approach to literature but does object to a historical approach that privileges the enumeration of facts and investigation of sources and influences over a synthesis of both the historical and artistic. In this respect his conception of comparative literature and the arguments he uses in support of it are essentially the same as those of Wellek in "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" or Auerbach in "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'".

The polemic between thematologists and "Villemainists" led to the development of one of the two most important approaches to comparative literature in the 20th century: the so-called French school.[2] Comparative literature *à la française* spread beyond France, especially in the interim between the

[2] There is ample literature on the emergence and evolution of the "French school". See, for example, Paul Van Tieghem, *La Littérature Comparée* (*Comparative Literature*, 1955), Pichois and Rousseau, *La Littérature Comparée* (*Comparative Literature*) (1973), or two works that present divergent views of this approach to comparative literature: Marius-François Guyard, *La Littérature comparée* (*Comparative Literature*, 1951) and Étiemble, *Comparaison n'est pas raison: La crise de la littérature comparée* (*Comparison Is Not Proof: The Crisis of Comparative Literature*, 1963).

two world wars when it enjoyed its greatest popularity. It was a major source of contention in Wellek's above-mentioned work and in the late 20th century was mainly to blame for comparative literature becoming synonymous with positivistic parochialism and counterproductive fact accumulation in formalist literary analysis. Possibly more harmful to the reputation of the French school than Wellek's criticism were its very own comparatists, who staunchly defended their position even after it became painfully clear that the method of literary-historical positivism on which their practice was founded had been convincingly discredited in the early 20th century by the different schools of the anti-positivist revolt. The main proponents and representatives of these schools, Baldensperger and Paul Hazard, founded the *Revue de littérature comparée* (*Review of Comparative Literature*), in which they promoted their conception of comparative literature.[3] They were later joined by Jean-Marie Carré, Baldensperger's successor at the Sorbonne, in the capacity of editor of the *Review*, as well as by van Tieghem, the author of the first French comparative literature handbook, *La Littérature comparée* (1931). In the first issue of the new journal, Baldensperger published a sort of manifesto of the new discipline, setting out its main goals and tasks. Adhering to the tradition of 19th century historicism, which had prevailed in France since Taine and Gustave Lanson, Baldensperger believed that it was necessary to study the standards of the past if literary history was to be written objectively. This meant that literary phenomena were to be viewed along the stages of their growth. Rejecting the contrastive study characteristic of thematology as insufficiently scientific, Baldensperger significantly narrowed the scope of comparative literature to focus on contact relations, which is to say on source and influence

[3] Pichois and Rousseau call it the "oldest journal of comparative literature" although they knew of Meltzl's *Acta comparationis*, which they mention earlier in their book as the "first journal" to deal with the themes of comparative literature (see Pichois and Rousseau, 1973: 23, 186).

studies. He defined comparative literature as a branch of literary history charged with the study of international literary relations. The object of study was not a specific work but its relation to other works. Explaining the ideas behind this school of comparative literature, Marius-François Guyard writes: "My teacher Jean-Marie Carré, following P. Hazard, and F. Baldensperger, finds that there where the link disappears – the link between a man and a text, between a work and the environment that receives it, between a country and a traveler, and so on, comparison ceases to exist and is replaced by either rhetoric or criticism " (Guyard 1965: 7). In other words, unlike literary criticism, which relies on subjective experience and value judgment and is thus not a science, comparative literature is a science, because it is only concerned with facts. Comparative literature, according to Carré, studies "factual contacts which took place between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Vigny, between the works, the inspirations, or even the lives of writers belonging to various literatures" (Carré 1965: 5). It does not consider "works in their original worth", deal with comparisons where contacts cannot be factually established, or study "grand syntheses" (literary trends like Humanism, Classicism, or Romanticism; literary fashions, movements, and schools). This programmatic stand reduces the study of "international relations" to the gathering of irrelevant facts about forgotten literary fashions, the tracing of influences and borrowings, and the study of unimportant authors and their justly forgotten works. In the essay that delivered the death blow to this approach to comparative literature, Wellek writes ironically that Baldensperger's most significant innovation was to include "minor" writers, second-rate works, and bygone fashions of literary taste in the study of literature (Wellek 1965: 286).

Van Tieghem, finding the subject matter of comparative literature as conceived by Baldensperger to be too narrowly defined, promoted the concept of general literature,

or, more precisely, the general history of literature.[4] He saw general literature not as a challenge to the views of the French comparatists but as a natural extension of the comparative study of literature. While the latter is concerned with the study of the interrelations between two national literatures, general literature deals with the movements and fashions that can be found in multiple national literatures. It studies transnational phenomena common to the literature of several countries, encompassing, in Van Tieghem's view, the greatest number of possible facts of different origins. After the Second World War, Carré also introduced a new approach to comparative literature by suggesting that because the general patterns in influence studies are sometimes hard to identify, other more concrete effects of international relations be considered as well: "Perhaps there has been too great a proclivity toward influence studies. These are difficult to conduct and often deceptive, since one sometimes risks attempting to weigh imponderables. More certain is the history of the success of works, the fortune of a writer, the fate of a great figure, the reciprocal interpretations of peoples, of travels and of mirages: how we see each other, Englishmen and Frenchmen, Frenchmen and Germans, etc." (Carré 1965: 6). Carré studied *mirages*, in other words, the conceptions that one nation has of another and that determine how a foreign literary work is received.[5] The study of *mirages* or of illusory images was very popular among comparatists, providing material for countless doctoral dissertations and

[4] Fr. *littérature générale*. Traditionally, the English term *general literature* had an entirely different meaning – being a rough equivalent to the contemporary term literary theory, but is rarely used today in the English-speaking world. The French term remains in currency but is most often used in the phrase: *littérature générale et comparée* (general and comparative literature). See Wellek 1971: 14. In Serbian scholarship, Svetozar Petrović has written about the different meanings of the term *general literature* (1976: 1-11).

[5] Carré's most important work, *Les écrivains français et le mirage allemand* (1947), belongs to this branch of comparative literature.

monographs. Traces of its popularity can be found even today in imagology, which is a direct outgrowth of Carré's theory of mirages.

The strict methodological approach taken by French comparatists can be seen, for example, in Carré's preface to Guyard's work *La Littérature comparée*,[6] in which he writes that not all literary comparisons are of value to comparative literature: "It does not do to compare just anything with anything, no matter when and no matter where." Comparative literature does not transpose the parallels of old rhetoricians (e.g. between Corneille and Racine, Voltaire and Rousseau, etc.) to the plane of foreign literatures, nor does it study the resemblances and differences between Tenysson and Musset, Dickens and Daudet. Carré explicitly states that "comparative literature is not general literature", which is to say that it is not the "subject taught in the United States": grand parallelisms like Humanism, Classicism, Romanticism and so forth tend to become "attenuated in abstraction", too arbitrary and indeterminate for them to be the subject of an empirical science like comparative literature is meant to be. Comparatists, Carré concludes, should not "advance in ragged formation but … discipline [their] forward march" (Carré 1965: 6).

The guidelines for research set out by French comparatists resulted in a glut of extraneous information on "secondary" writers and their deservedly forgotten books, multi-volume bibliographies of articles and monographs on comparative literature languishing beneath thick layers of dust on library shelves, recapitulations, catalogues, and hair-splitting categorizations of sources and influences – which have practically no use for us, except as the moral of a story. And it is precisely for this reason that it is worth remembering today: at a time of resurgent positivist relativism and the leveling of values.

[6] Reprinted in the first issue of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* (1952: 8-9).

There are not many precedents in the history of literary studies that warn as convincingly of the perils of wasted effort and demonstrate the extent to which a lack of sensitivity for that which is most valuable in literature can be ruinous not only to critics who are devoid of such sensibility but also to the discipline they are pursuing. In that respect, there is still validity in Croce's prophetic assessment that literary study of all kinds, including comparative study, is unfruitful and useless work so long as it is not based on historical-aesthetic synthesis and rigorous evaluative criteria. Had comparative literature continued down that path, there is no doubt that it would have become an entirely forgotten discipline. However, following World War Two, there was a renewed interest in the comparative study of literature and this time it gained wider institutional support than had been the case during Gayley's and Woodberry's time. In point of fact, Werner Friederich, who studied under and worked with the French comparatists, started this new wave of American comparative literature and, at least in the beginning, kept it going himself. In Paris, he was called "the Christopher Columbus of American comparative literature",[7] which was no exaggeration: he brought Baldensperger and Hazard's teaching to American universities, made a significant contribution to the promotion and institutionalization of comparative literature in the United States (and beyond), and ultimately established fruitful cooperation among American and European comparatists.

Friederich was a native of Switzerland, but his interest in comparative literature was sparked by his studies at the Sorbonne, where he became acquainted with the ideas of Baldensperger, Hazard, and Carré at the Institute of Comparative Literature. He earned a PhD at Harvard in 1932 for the thesis entitled *Spiritualismus und Sensualismus*

[7] In *Revue de littérature comparée*, André Rousseau wrote that "V. P. Friederich was welcomed in Paris in 1948 as the Christopher Columbus of American comparative literature" (Stallknecht and Frenz 1963: 111).

in der englischen Barocklyrik, and spent his entire career as a professor at Chapel Hill where, between 1935 and 1970, he taught various courses in German and comparative literature.[8] Friederich was one of the founders of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) and the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), the founder and one of the first editors of the journal *Comparative Literature* at the University of Oregon (1949) and the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* (1952) at the University of Indiana, and started up a highly esteemed monograph series dedicated to comparative literature studies that was published by the University of North Carolina from 1950 to 1959 1980: *University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature*. The series issued 68 monographs and had been established by Friederich in order to publish Baldesnperger's bibliography, which he co-authored. Work on this bibliography was of central importance to the institutionalization of comparative literature in America as an academic discipline. According to Friederich's own account, he had agreed to help Baldensperger compile the Bibliography of Comparative Literature during a visit to Paris (Leonard 2010: 182). Baldensperger had slowly been amassing the material, since 1904 to be exact, when he brought out a revision to the first comparative literature bibliography assembled by Louis-Paul Betz, which had required him to come up with a unique, fairly complex logical classification system. However, perceiving that the sheer volume of the material surpassed his abilities, Baldensperger presented his entire card-file to Harvard's Wildener Library, where Friederich agreed to work on compiling and publishing it. According to

[8] These were courses on the influence of French Classicism on the Age of Enlightenment, Anglo-German Romanticisim, the foreign influence of the Italian Renaissance, and the Spanish golden age. The program in comparative literature at Chapel Hill set out by Friederich, and which he led for more than thirty years, was one of the best and most highly-esteemed in the United States.

Friederich, Baldensperger had left the Harvard library a catalogue containing more than 15,000 slips; work on sorting them took five years and when the bibliography was finally published, it contained more than 33,000 entries. On the content published by *Comparative Literature*, Wellek writes: "Mr. Friederich can be proud of his achievement. He has given all students of comparative literature and actually all students of literature an invaluable, indispensible tool, an up-to-date, very full, and generally accurate survey of all scholarship which can be called comparative literature."[9]

Friederich was the host and organizer of the largest congress in the history of comparative literature, the Second Congress of the ICLA, held in 1958 at Chapel Hill.[10] Some 260 participants attended the congress, about 60 from Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Latin America, among whom was a Yugoslav, Mirko Denović, from Zagreb, who presented a paper on, "La litérature comparée et les pays slavs" ("Comparative Literature and Slavic Countries"). The significance of this congress lay not in its scale nor in the fact that it was the first international congress in the humanities to be held after the Second World War (Friederich 1959: I, xxv), but in the radical shift in comparative literature studies that it effected, setting the discipline on a new and divergent course. Within the field of comparative literature, Chapel Hill symbolizes a decisive battle between comparatists of the old school, members of the so-called French school, and new, American comparitists,

[9] *Comparative Literature* 3:1 (1951), 90-92, cited in: Leonard 2010: 183. Apart from the *Bibliography*, Friederich's other works are: *Dante's Fame Abroad 1350-1850* (1950), *Outline of Comparative Literature from Dante Alighieri to Eugene O'Neill* (1954), with David Henry Malone, and *Australia in Western Imaginative Prose Writings 1600-1960* (1967).

[10] The First Congress of the ICLA was held in 1955 in Venice, but it was smaller and, apart from Friederich, there were practically no other attendees from the United States (See: Leonard 2010: 185).

who were headed at this congress by René Wellek. In other words, a battle over methodology was waged between positivist scholars, who saw comparative literature as a historical discipline, and anti-positivist scholars, who strove to bring comparative literature closer to the theoretical spectrum of literary scholarship.[11] As early as the 1950s it became clear that comparative literature as it was conceived by the French school – as the study of influences and borrowings – had descended into crisis. The argument that broke out over the subject and method of comparative literature came to a head on the second to last day of the congress at a panel session on the "Scope and Methodology of Comparative Literature" chaired by Renato Poggioli from Harvard. The panel was attended by Marcel Bataillon, one of the most esteemed representatives of the French school, a professor of comparative literature at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France and decades-long editor of *Revue de littérature comparée*. Wellek, in what was to become his well-known survey, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature", put forward a string of serious, well-argued objections to the French school; but by criticizing French comparatists, he was in fact indirectly criticizing Friederich and his approach to comparative literature.

Wellek was criticizing Baldensperger, Carré, and Van Tieghem's methods in order to make a cogent argument in favor of an entirely different approach to the comparative study of literature, which may be called comparative literature *à la americaine* because it was practiced not only by Wellek but by many other thinkers who lived and worked in America following the Second World War, among whom were such prominent figures as Spitzer and Auerbach.

[11] The significance of Chapel Hill to the history of comparative literature is attested to by the fact that twelve years later, in April 1980, the ACLA held its seventh triennial meeting at Chapel Hill in order to commemorate Friederich's historical congress. The meeting was also attended by many participants of the 1958 congress, including Wellek and Friederich (See: Leonard 1010: 187).

Wellek's conception of comparative literature, as formulated in that work, is an expression of a general, humanistic attitude towards literature and its values characteristic of several antipositivist, structuralist-formalist approaches that had supplanted previous approaches as early as the first decades of the 20th century. Wellek enumerated some of them: Croce and his followers in Italy, Russian formalism and structuralist concepts that were developed in Czechoslovakia and Poland, *Geistesgeschichte* and stylistics in Germany and Spain, French and German existentialism, American New Criticism, myth criticism, and even Freudian analysis and Marxism (Wellek 1965: 292-293). Although sometimes disparate, all of these approaches were united in a reaction against the external factualism and historicism of the traditional study of literature. They rejected the positivist idea of national literature as a self-contained system, and saw Western European literature as a unified whole, i.e. an assemblage of works that were written in different languages but were nonetheless the legacy of the same historical, cultural, and literary tradition. In the most important conceptions of this kind – such as Auerbach's or Curtius' "world" and European literature, canons of the most valuable and exemplary works were represented which, alongside "great" Western European literatures, included American, Russian, Biblical, Greek, and Roman literature, as well as a few works from "smaller" or lesser-known literatures, like Oriental literature. No sooner had the Chapel Hill Congress ended than comparative literature *à la americaine* became a recognized method.[12] Although it was not, strictly speaking, a literary-theoretical school, it was named the American school so that it might form an opposition to the French school. Unlike French comparatists, who presented

[12] For more on this, see Wellek's work "Comparative Literature Today", which describes the circumstances in which American comparative literature emerged as well as interesting circumstances surrounding the historic congress at Chapel Hill (Wellek 1970: 37-55). Also see Étiemble 1963: 61-78.

themselves as a united front and had shared goals and methods, American comparatists were a very heterogenic group of philologists, literary theorists, and literary critics who were united by anti-positivist leanings and a conviction that literature should be studied as literature, setting great store by its aesthetic and universal humanistic values.

Wellek, as one such comparatist, polemicizing with French comparatists, tried to formulate the principles of a new comparative literature. He first takes issue with French comparatists for failing to set out "a distinct subject matter and a specific methodology". French comparatists, he writes, "have saddled comparative literature with an obsolete methodology and have laid on it the dead hand of nineteenth-century factualism, scientism, and historical relativism" (Wellek 1965: 282). Apart from that, they artificially narrowed the subject to the study of sources and influences. For Wellek, such an understanding of comparative literature is no different from Van Tieghem's general literature: "Why should, say, the influence of Walter Scott in France be considered 'comparative' literature while a study of the historical novel during the Romantic age be 'general' literature? Why should we distinguish between a study of the influence of Byron on Heine and the study of Byronism in Germany?" (Wellek 1965: 283).

Wellek also doubts the *literary* nature of the scholarship practiced by French comparatists. While it may be profitable, he writes, to learn what the French think of Germany or of England, can such scholarship still be understood as the study of literature? By studying *mirages*, literature becomes "social psychology and cultural history": "The attempt to set up artificial fences between comparative and general literature must fail because literary history and literary scholarship have one subject: literature. The desire to confine 'comparative literature' to the study of the foreign

trade of two literatures limits it to a concern with externals, with second-rate writers, with translations, travel books, 'intermediaries'; in short, it makes 'comparative literature' a mere subdiscipline investigating data about the foreign sources and reputations of writers" (Wellek 1965: 285, 284).

Finally, Wellek points to the "paradox in the psychological and social motivation" of comparative literature thus conceived. Although it had emerged as a reaction to the "nationalism" and "isolationism" of 19th century literary history, comparative literature had often displayed the unmistakable symptoms of "cultural expansionism" and literary chauvinism.[13] That led to the appearance of strange "cultural bookkeeping", the wish to "accumulate credits for one's nation by proving as many influences as possible on other nations or, more subtly, by proving that one's own nation has assimilated and 'understood' a foreign master more fully than any other" (Wellek 1965: 289). This kind of "cultural expansionism" can even be found in the United States which, Wellek writes, "on the whole, has been immune to it partly because it had less to boast of and partly because it was less concerned with cultural politics" (Wellek 1965: 289).

These three problems – the artificial narrowing of the object of study, obsolete methods, and cultural nationalism – present to Wellek the symptoms of a crisis that had been shaking up comparative literature for some time. In order for this crisis to be overcome, Wellek suggests that radical changes be made on all three fronts.

First and foremost, the artificial demarcation between "comparative" and "general" literature should be rejected, along with other unnatural divisive "restrictions" that specialists from other disciplines dare not encroach upon.

[13] According to Wellek, this is especially strange because some of the most esteemed comparatists, such as Curtius or Arturo Farinelli, themselves hailed from multiracial backgrounds or lived and worked in multiracial environments (Wellek 1965: 287).

Surely comparatists would not want to "prevent English professors from studying the French sources of Chaucer, or French professors from studying the Spanish sources of Corneille" (Wellek 1965: 291) According to Wellek, it would be ideal if there were no national distinctions between literatures and if the study of literature as such and literary scholarship were referred to as "a unified discipline unhampered by linguistic restrictions": "The whole conception of fenced-off reservations with signs of 'no trespassing' must be distasteful to a free mind. It can arise only within the limits of the obsolete methodology preached and practiced by the standard theorists of comparative literature who assume that 'facts' are to be discovered like nuggets of gold for which we can stake out prospectors' claims" (Wellek 1965: 290-291). Apart from that, the positivist method of accumulating external facts ought to be rejected once and for all, because the study of literature does not deal with facts but with values. Finally, the positivist approach to literary history adopted by French comparatists also needed to be radically reoriented. Literary history is not a science but a type of literary criticism, because it requires value judgment: "No literary history has ever been written without some principle of selection and some attempt at characterization and evaluation" (Wellek 1965: 292). As the formulation of the goals and tasks of the study of literature at the end of Wellek's essay seems germane to the contemporary crisis of comparative literature, it deserves to be cited in full:

> Literary scholarship today needs primarily a realization of the need to define its subject matter and focus. It must be distinguished from the study of the history of ideas, or religious and political concepts and sentiments which are often suggested as alternatives to literary studies. Many eminent men in literary scholarship and particularly in comparative literature are not really interested in literature at all but in the history of public opinion, the reports of travelers, the ideas

> about national character – in short, in general cultural history. The concept of literary study is broadened by them so radically that it becomes identical with the whole history of humanity. But literary scholarship will not make any progress, methodologically, unless it determines to study literature as a subject distinct from other activities and products of man. Hence we must face the problem of "literariness," the central issue of aesthetics, the nature of art and literature. (Wellek 1965: 293)

According to Wellek, the literary work – specifically those of its features that make it literary – should be the sole focus of study. Having thus outlined his conception of literary scholarship, Wellek emphasizes that he is not advocating narrow formalism, which would deemphasize the cultural-historical context of a work and be confined to linguistic and stylistic analysis. Such an approach would be one-dimensional and thus wrong, Wellek writes, just like its antithesis, the obsolete historicisim of French comparative literature. He considers extremes to be inappropriate to literary debate and posits that the only correct approach is to view a literary work as a diversified whole, like "a structure of signs", which has values and historical meaning.

The last sentences in Wellek's essay are overwhelmingly reminiscent of Croce's and Auerbach's thoughts on the nature of literary studies. They made a case for comparative literature as a model humanist discipline. "Once", Wellek writes, "we conceive of literature not as an argument in the warfare of cultural *prestige*, or as a commodity of foreign trade … we shall obtain the only true objectivity obtainable to man." But that objectivity will be neither "neutral scientism" nor "indifferent realism"; it will be "a dispassionate … intense contemplation which will lead to analysis and finally to judgments of value". Once we are able to study literature as literature, which is to say, when we become capable of pointing to what is "art and poetry" in a poem,

all national vanities will disappear and, "Man, universal man, everywhere and at any time, in all his variety" will appear. Then the study of literature, Wellek writes, will become, "an act of the imagination, like art itself, and thus a preserver and creator of the highest values of mankind" (Wellek 1965: 295).

In a later work,[14] Wellek writes of the goals and methods of comparative literature in a similar vein. Comparative literature, he writes, is best defined and defended by its spirit and perspective. Comparative literature is the study of "all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience"; it is a unique kind of literary study because it is "independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries". It is not confined to a single method; apart from comparison, it also employs description, explanation, interpretation, and narration. Comparative literature does not exclude any method, not even literary criticism, and its canon is not only oriented towards the past but can also include contemporary literary works. According to Wellek, comparative literature will have a future only if it succeeds in ridding itself of all "artificial limitations and becomes simply the study of literature" (Wellek 1971: 19-20).

After Chapel Hill, no one doubted which school had won the methodological showdown that took place there. This victory was all the more significant because it ultimately determined the fate of comparative literature, which is to say the discipline's character; its consequences are apparent even today, particularly in the dominant theoretical views in literary scholarship. And only two years after the congress, in Friederich's *Yearbook* from 1960, the first to be published under the editorship not of himself but of K. L. Selig and Horst Frenz, Henry H. H. Remak

[14] "The Name and the Nature of Comparative Literature."

wrote: "The recent Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association held at Chapel Hill has served to clarify and to define conflicting currents in this discipline that have been fermenting uneasily in the last two decades, especially since the end of World War II. The long awaited confrontation of the 'French' and the 'American schools' of Comparative Literature has taken place, and its results are available to teachers and scholars everywhere in the form of two substantial volumes of Proceedings which have been published with a completeness and a speed unique in the annals of such undertakings".[15] This turn of events must have been unpleasant for Friederich, an adherent of the 'French' approach to comparative literature which he had adopted while a student at the Sorbonne.[16] But he accepted defeat like a gentleman. He took it upon himself to edit and publish the conference Proceedings in 1959 in an edition of *University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature* (1959), though he withdrew from the editorial position the following year. [17] The congress he organized at Chapel Hill and the Proceedings he published marked the pinnacle of his career. After that, he participated only in the ACLA, which he presided from 1960-1962, to be succeeded by Wellek and Harry Levin.

[15] Henry. H. H. Remak, "Comparative Literature at the Crossroads: Diagnosis, Therapy, and Prognosis", Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature IX, 1960, 1.

[16] It should be noted, however, that Friederich was closer to Van Tieghem and his ideas of general literature – which is also evident from the courses he taught and his books and reference books on comparative literature – than to Baldensperger and Carré's orthodox teaching of contact relations between two national literatures. But in a methodological sense, Friederich belonged entirely to the French camp because he saw comparative literature as a branch of literary history, and that view was essentially relativistic and positivistic.

[17] *University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature* was edited in 1960 by K. L. Selig from the University of North Carolina and Horst Frenz from the University of Indiana, and since 1961 has been published in Indiana, with Frenz as the editor-in-chief.

Although Friederich and Wellek had adopted two opposing methodological approaches, they nonetheless shared something in common: both understood comparative literature as the study of international literary relations, which is to say – to cite Wellek, as a literary study that transcends the borders of any single national literature. In the years following the Second World War, when Europe was in ruins, Friederich advocated cosmopolitanism in literature, believing that the newly united Europe would rise swiftly from the ashes through the contributions made by literature and culture. The contribution made by American comparative literature to that process was not insignificant:

> [To] a post-war Europe sorely beset by financial difficulties and by an extreme dearth of paper and of scholarly journals, we shall be glad to extend our helping hand … For somehow we feel, with joy and with pride, that what we are doing is part of the deeper meaning of the Marhsall Plan, that our vigorous activity somehow goes beyond the realm of mere book-learning, that we are here to help each other, to understand each other, and to save together with you the great cultural heritage that belongs to us, the Western World. (Friederich 1955: 59)

On retiring from the Department of Comparative Literature at Chapel Hill, Friederich made one more symbolic gesture seeking compromise between the French and American schools of comparative literature. He established the Marcel Bataillon Professorship at the department where he had taught for thirty years, demonstrating in this way his deep respect not only for comparatists at the Sorbonne but for French comparative literature in general. At the same time, however, Friederich chose as his successor and the first holder of the Marcel Bataillon Professorship Eugene Falk, a comparatist from Prague, whose educational background and methodological orientation was much closer to Wellek's understanding of comparative literature

than to Friederich's or to Bataillon's. According to Diane Leonard, Friederich's decision was a clear sign of his reconciliation with Wellek's approach to comparative literature, which privileged theory over literary history and criticism (Leonard 2010: 190). Leonard also notes that Wellek himself "made a *rapprochement* of sorts". In the early eighties at a lecture he gave at Duke University, he said that the "new crisis in comparative literature" had been reached because an exaggerated interest in theory had led to a loss of interest in literature itself. According to Leonard, who had read Friederich's unpublished memoir, Wellek had on that occasion called on Friederich at his home in Chapel Hill to say to him how disappointed he was that his endeavor to establish literary theory as the core of comparative literature had gone awry (Leonard 2010: 190). Like all oral testimony on theoretical matters, the account can only be taken at face value, but it is still possible to agree with the diagnosis given by Wellek in it. It is very much in line with the views of some contemporary comparatists, as mentioned in the first chapter of this book.

LATER DEBATES ON METHODODOLOGY

Debates on the methods of comparative literature failed to subside even in the years that followed. Wellek's reflections, when viewed from today's vantage point, clearly began a new tradition in comparative literature, which could be described as constant self-questioning. While there have of course continued to be comparatists in Europe who examine the subject and method of their discipline, the tradition under discussion here is a trait of American comparative literature for institutional reasons, among others. In the United States, unlike in Europe, higher education is largely left to the laws of the market even at state universities, so comparatists there are forced

to comply with market demands. The ACLA has a statutory obligation to submit a report every decade on "professional standards", which have lately been euphemistically termed "the state of the discipline". To that end, a committee comprised of several prominent members of the association examines both the current institutional and methodological standing of comparative literature, and submits a report on it. The committee considers a very broad range of questions. Its task, among other things, is to review the current methods and subjects of study; count the newly established and dissolved departments; register the most important publications, conferences, and congresses; report on specialist research: in short, give the latest diagnosis of the state of comparative literature studies in America. So far, four such reports have been compiled and published (1965, 1975, 1993 and 2004).[18] When viewed in continuity, they constitute their own history of late 20th century comparative literature, primarily in the United States but also beyond.

[18] The 1985 report was compiled but never published because the president of the committee that assembled it was dissatisfied with it (see Bernheimer 1995: ix). The four published reports are "The Levin Report", "The Greene Report", "The Bernheimer Report", and "The Saussy Report". They form the basis of two volumes: *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Charles Bernheimer (ed.), Johns Hopkins U.P., 1995, in which the first three reports were published together with responses and position papers, and *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, Haun Saussy (ed.), Johns Hopkins U.P., 2006, which presents the fourth report and accompanying responses and position papers. The 2014-2015 report is still being prepared. It differs from the previous reports primarily because it exists only in electronic format. Apart from that, it is the first report not signed by any of the most esteemed comparatists – tenured professors hailing from some of the most prestigious American universities, but is instead being edited by a team of instructors from multiple private and state universities. Finally, this report, rather than laying down comprehensive standards, is open to contributions from all members of the ACLA, which are published on the organization's site if they are approved by the editorial board. The report can be found at the following website address: http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/

The 1965 "Report on Professional Standards" was compiled by a committee comprising, among others, A. O. Aldridge, Ralph Freedman, Wellek, and Alain Renoir, and was presided by Levin. Published at a time when comparative literature in the United States was, in the words of an author of a later report, "gaining momentum" at American universities, the "Levin Report" was less concerned with methodological and specialist questions than with laying down standards for the teaching of comparative literature in higher education. These standards mostly pertained to the language proficiency and education required of students but also to the qualifications required of instructors, which included not only the "broad" perspectives of comparative literature but also knowledge of at least one, but ideally two, national literatures. The committee further set out guidelines for library facilities, departmental composition, seminar organization, and other technical matters relevant to the promotion of the study of comparative literature. Levin's committee set very high standards, most probably to forestall criticism that had been directed at comparative literature both at and prior to that time. Almost since its inception, comparative literature has been criticized for not being scholarly enough and failing to establish a distinct subject matter, just as its "specialists" have been criticized for lacking the expertise required to conduct research in multiple national literatures, which is to say that they are considered dilettantes and not true scholars.[19] Such criticism has primarily been launched by the so-called national disciplines, by those who consider that the only guarantee of scientific rigor is to remain within the framework of one language and one national literature. Suspicious of the object of comparative study, they have seen it at best as a kind of auxiliary discipline that would supplement the primary

[19] Wellek himself outlines such criticism in his Chapel Hill address (Wellek 1965: 291).

study – of the history of national literature. Such criticism is not always motivated by professional reasons and is sometimes prompted by prosaic considerations related to university politics. This can also be concluded from the Levin Report. Levin's central concern – which, admittedly, is never explicitly stated but is without a doubt implied throughout – is the problem of the academic coexistence of the study of comparative literature and the study of individual national literatures. At a time when comparative literature was outgrowing its marginal status to become a prestigious academic discipline, it had to align the interests of the new departments of comparative literature with those of the old departments of national literatures. Emphasizing that there was no contention between comparative literature and national literatures and that collaboration, not competition, was the order of the day, Levin's committee strove to obviate fear of eventual rivalry.[20]

The second "Report on Professional Standards" was composed in 1971 by a committee headed by Levin's mentee, Thomas Greene. It was the golden age of comparative literature in the United States. Greene's committee concluded that comparative literature, whether within the framework of self-contained departments or smaller programs of study, was taught at 150 academic institutions in America, which was almost twice as many as had existed at the time of the previous report.[21] What is more, according to this report,

[20] Wellek writes of the fundamental relations between comparative literature and specific national literatures (Wellek 1971: 36).

[21] Only a decade earlier, Levin's committee concluded that "our subject is now represented in the catalogues of about eighty academic institutions within the United States" and that the number "continues to enlarge from term to term" (Bernheimer 1995a: 21). The 2014 ACLA report cited 117 programs in which comparative literature could be studied at the undergraduate level (see http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/report-undergraduate-comparative-literature-curriculum-update). Data on postgraduate studies were not given.

comparative literature was taught at a large number of universities as a major in undergraduate programs and as an independent discipline in postgraduate programs, which speaks to the popularity of this subject among students and, by extension, at universities in general. High professional standards were also set by the "Greene Report". Students were expected to have knowledge of at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue, specialization in one national literature but ideally in two, and/or training in a related discipline like anthropology, sociology, and psychology. This report is interesting primarily because it augured major changes that, while being inconceivable at the time, would come to pass as early as the next decade. Its authors pointed to some of the dangers that, in their opinion, might threaten the future of the discipline. They predicted the greatest danger would come from its popularization. While the propagation of comparative literature by, for example, offering classes in world literature as electives in national literature departments might benefit the discipline, it would do so at a cost. Such world literature classes, which usually went by the title of *Great Books* at American universities, were problematic because they were taught in translation and thus carried the danger of lowering standards – especially when presented as courses in 'true' comparative literature. Greene's committee concluded that courses in which students studied the most important works of world literature in English were to be tolerated only where comparative literature was merely a subsidiary subject, and only at the undergraduate level; students of 'pure' comparative literature, especially postgraduates and doctoral candidates – not to mention instructors – were to have a thorough understanding of works of world literature in their original languages.

The "Greene Report" also documented a growing interest in non-Eurocentric literatures. Although the authors of the report ostensibly welcome the study of smaller or

less-studied literatures, they recommend that they be approached warily. Comparative literature is still not ready for globalization. It is conceivable for the study of Hebrew to be permitted as a substitution for ancient Greek and Latin as it belongs to the same Western European heritage; similarly, Arabic is also "logical" because of its influence on the Hispanic tradition, but when it comes to the study of literatures that are far removed from Europe and America, "methodological prudence must be tempered with flexibility", because, according to the authors of "The Greene Report": "We are still lacking the concepts and tools that will permit us truly to study literature at the global level" (Bernheimer 1995: 36). The Greene committee takes a similar approach to the "burgeoning of cross-disciplinary programs", also commonly referred to as interdisciplinary programs. Comparatists should welcome them, but with caution. The crossing of disciplines can be mutually beneficial, enabling knowledge and horizons to be broadened and phenomena to be viewed from new and different perspectives. But the authors of the report fear that the losses could outweigh the gains if the latter means compromising scientific rigor and theoretical purity: "Misty formulations, invisible comparisons, useless ingenuities, wobbly historiography plague all fields in the Humanities, including our own: cross-disciplinary programs are not immune from them" (Bernheimer 1995: 36).

The Greene committee made an appeal to methodological rigor for another reason. The call for theoretical purity implies reservations not only about interdisciplinary research but also about literary theory.[22] By emphasizing the importance of studying literature from a historical perspective, the committee was challenging the notion

[22] Bernheimer, the author of the successive report, notes that this can only be read between the lines (Bernheimer 1995: 41), but for the intended audience it would be very clear.

that literary theory should have a place in comparative literary study. Only the historical method is legitimate: "Comparative literature as a discipline rests unalterably on the knowledge of history" (Bernheimer 1995: 34). The reservations about theory expressed in Greene's report become more understandable in the broader context of literary studies in America. From the late 1960s, professors of literature at American universities, until then mostly devoted to rather narrow national specializations and surveys of 19th century French, English, or Spanish literature, began to "borrow" various theories from other disciplines: philosophy, sociology, film and media studies, and the political sciences. Initially, that led to the expansion of the sphere of study but then it led to a methodological shift, specifically, to the belief that it is erroneous to study literature without reference to literary theory and other disciplines. In the United States, the 1970s and 1980s saw the complete domination of the historical approach to literature by literary theory. Theory of all kinds – structuralism, deconstruction, poststructuralism – was welcomed with open arms at American universities, and comparative literature departments became the epicenters of theoretical study. In a paper that points to some of the causes of the crisis in contemporary American comparative literature, Andrew Wachtel writes that literary theory very quickly began to displace literature itself, so that in courses on comparative literature, theoretical and philosophical questions were increasingly debated while literary works were decreasingly read and interpreted (Wachtel 2005: 119-120). Reading, analysis, and interpretation were replaced by theoretical introductions, methodological surveys, and courses on theoretical questions. Wachtel considers that such developments delivered a final blow to comparative literature at American universities. Theory, not only in a methodological but in an institutional sense, squeezed comparative literature out of

American universities, which led to comparative literature departments closing down across the United States.

Levin's and Greene's reports depart from the same conception of literature and comparative literature. In both overviews, the comparative study of literature is still – loosely speaking – conceived of as a type of traditional *literary* study which, specific goals and tasks notwithstanding, are to help shed light on a literary work in a primarily literary context. The two reports also concur in their assessment of what poses a threat to the comparative study of literature. They perceived the greatest dangers to be the excessive reliance on translations in the classroom, the replacement of historical with theoretical perspectives, and, ultimately, the ever greater presence of "interdisciplinary" studies. The successive report, which was composed in 1993 by a committee headed by Bernheimer, brought such radical changes that the methods and focus of the old, Wellekian comparative literature became all but non-existent. This report also showed that the predictions and fears contained in the previous reports had been realized almost to the letter. Bernheimer's committee first notes that the standards outlined in the previous reports no longer define the discipline. The committee finds the changes that have transpired in the interim to be so substantial as to necessitate a redefinition of the goals and methods of the discipline; in other words, a redefinition of the discipline as a whole. No standards are set in this report; rather, current practices in the field of comparative literature are described – that said, however, there is no doubt as to the type of comparative literature this committee favors. Bernheimer's committee concludes that the "restrictive Eurocentrism" of earlier reports is being questioned today by "multiple perspectives":

> The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different

> disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and post-contact [with the West] cultural productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of its modes of production and circulation; and much more. (Bernheimer 1995: 42)

In Bernheimer's exhaustive list of "cultural productions" that have become subjects of study in comparative literature today, there is no place for just one thing – literature. Of course, that is no coincidence, and already in the following sentence the committee makes a claim that caused quite a stir among comparatists when the report was made, but to no effect:

> These ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres that the term "literature" may no longer adequately describe our object of study. (Bernheimer 1995: 42)

"Contextualizing literature" from "expanded" viewpoints means that literary texts that are the object of study are not viewed in terms of their specific literary meaning – "aesthetic genius" as Croce writes or, in Wellek's words, from the standpoint of "art and poetry", but are approached as a "discursive practice", culturally mediated and historically situated. Bernheimer writes: "Literary phenomena are no longer the exclusive focus of our discipline. Rather, literary texts are now being approached as one discursive practice among many others in a complex, shifting, and often contradictory field of cultural production" (Bernheimer 1995: 42).

"Contextualizing literature" or, as traditional theory would formulate it, an interest in the external, extra-textual circumstances in which a literary work comes into being or is received, brings with it significant changes in the approach to the comparative study of literature. First and foremost, the Bernheimer committee's "fundamental adjustments" consist of changes to the traditional canon of comparative literature. Comparative literature departments are advised to "moderate their focus on high literary discourse" and focus more on "the entire discursive context in which texts are created and such heights are constructed": "For instance, Comparative Literature courses should teach not just Great Books but also how a book comes to be designated as 'great' in a particular culture, that is, what interests have been and are invested in maintaining this label" (Bernheimer 1995: 46). In other words, not only are the most important and valuable literary works to be examined, as prescribed by Goethe, Croce, Wellek, and Auerbach, but the "smaller" writers and lesser works, as well, as advised by Meltzl, Posnett, Hazard, and Carré. As was the case with French comparative literature, here, too, the turn away from earlier trends of literary taste is an expression of historical relativism and, more broadly, a scientistic and antihumanistic stance toward literature, so ubiquitous as to remain unnoticed. It is not difficult to predict, given the mistakes of the past, that when accounts are drawn up at some future time, it will transpire that the greatest damage not only to comparative literature but to the study of literature in general and thus to literature itself will have been done by changing the canon, i.e. by removing from it classic works of European and American literature and introducing into it secondary works or works from geographically "small" and culturally distant literatures.

In the same "multicultural" spirit, the Bernheimer committee advises university department and program

heads to recruit faculty from non-European literature departments and from "allied disciplines" in order to broaden "the cultural scope of Comparative Literature offerings" (Bernheimer 1995: 45). It remains unclear where graduated bachelors and doctors of comparative literature are to find employment if their peers from other departments take those positions. On the other hand, it goes without saying that the interdisciplinary character of "new comparative literature" encourages comparisons between literature and other media, "from early manuscripts to TV, Hypertext and Virtual Realities", including in the wider focus of comparative literature subjects that had been neglected since the time of Pichois and Rousseau, such as "the business of book-making but also the cultural space and function of reading and writing and the physical properties of newer communicative media" (Bernheimer 1995: 45). Finally, the Bernheimer committee sounded the death knell for the last bastion of traditional comparative literature: proficiency in foreign languages. Admittedly, the report did maintain that knowledge of multiple languages is fundamental to this type of study, and that students should be encouraged to study at least one non-European language. But the importance of such knowledge was no longer to be found in the meaning it can have for "analysis of literary meaning", but in their "value for understanding the role of a native tongue in creating subjectivity, in establishing epistemological patterns, in imagining communal structures, in forming notions of nationhood, and in articulating resistance and accommodation to political and cultural hegemony" (Bernheimer 1995: 43).

The "Bernheimer Report" is an expression of the anti-formalist, anti-elitist, and essentially *anti-literary* approach to literature that has dominated literary scholarship since the 1980s, not just in America. Because of the lack of faith both in literature and the study of it in the traditional sense of those words, this approach would be more aptly termed cultural

studies rather than comparative literature or the comparative study of literature. Some authors consider a compromise between cultural and comparative studies to be feasible, which is to say that they consider it possible to create a hybrid approach, which could be termed, for example, comparative cultural studies, and which would focus on the "contextualization" of a literary text and its interpretation within the framework of other discursive structures.[23] But such a symbiosis is not possible except if the goal is to create a theoretical Frankenstein, because a Wellekian understanding of comparative literature as the study of literary works as *literary* from the standpoint of their transnational significance is essentially diametric to cultural studies as they are generally practiced today. Comparative literature is the study of literary universals – that which transcends the border of a single national literature and culture, while cultural studies deal with what is unique to a given culture – that which differentiates it from other cultures and thus remains within respective borders. In this regard, Culler writes in his response to the "Bernheimer Report" that the shift towards culture and the "global" canon that Bernheimer's committee suggests should in fact be carried out in national literature departments. It would make much more sense, Culler argues, for national literature departments to turn to cultural studies and for comparative literature to once again be left to the study of literature:

> French literature is obviously part of French culture, so let French departments become departments of French studies to examine it in this way. But it is also part of literature in general, and to study it as such, in all its ramifications, is the task – still daunting and requiring all the resources we can command – of comparative literature. The evolution of other departments will, perhaps, let us become comparative literature at last. (Culler 1995: 121)

[23] Others who subscribe to this view include Saussy, the author of the most recent ACLA report from 2006 (See: Saussy 2006: 3-43).

Other authors, such as Michael Riffaterre and Peter Brooks in their reactions to the "Bernheimer Report", also shared Culler's views, but it seemed to most that a symbiosis of comparative literature and cultural studies was achievable.[24] Welcoming the idea of multiculturalism with open arms, a new generation of comparatists enthusiastically leaped onto the territory of "small" languages and "other" literatures and began to promote comparative studies as "the multicultural recontextualization of Anglo-American and European perspectives" (Bernheimer 1995: 44). The nostalgic lament of a few ageing comparatists, like Riffaterre, Culler, and Brooks notwithstanding, it seems as if no one continues to bewail the golden age of comparative literature and literary studies. What is more, in the tone of some of the "new comparatists", it is often not hard to detect hints that a great deal of dancing is being done on the graves of Wellekian intellectual elitism and the "Eurocentric exclusivity" of the traditional canon of comparative literature. But whatever there is to say about the exclusivity of traditional comparative literature, it cannot be denied that the speech of the "new comparatists" is itself burdened with methodological exclusivity and arrogance. Culler attests to this. He was one of the authors who had been asked to submit comments and suggestions to Bernheimer's report when it was still being compiled. Judging by the title "Comparative Literature, at Last!" that Culler chose for his essay published in the block of texts that accompanied Bernehimer's report, it is obvious that Culler was not exactly sympathetic to Bernehimer's project for the comparative study of cultures (Culler 1995: 120). That impression is confirmed by Culler's subsequent work on the same subject, published in the most recent ACLA anthology. Although Culler's paper goes by the same title: "Comparative Literature at Last" (minus the absence of the

[24] Riffaterre 1995: 66-77 and Brooks 1995: 97-107.

exclamation point from the first paper), and contains the same basic message, it is not the same text; in it, Culler brings a more systematic approach to the problematics that had only been intimated in his previous work.[25] In one section of this work, Culler writes that Bernheimer "belittled" authors of position papers who in response to his report "defended literature or opined that the study of literature ought to retain a central place in comparative literature" and that "in a fashion typical of him, disregarded everyone's comments to write just what he wished": "Defenders of literature were treated as old fogies who were inexplicably resisting getting with the program" (Saussy 2006: 240). The arrogance that Culler points to is nonetheless evident in the "Bernheimer Report" itself, which clearly shows where the authors' sympathies lie.

But as demonstrated by the examples of Spivak and Apter, contempt for elitism does not preclude large numbers of "new comparatists" from competing for positions held by old comparatists. Of the various pretenders to that legacy, Moretti's view of world literature will be briefly considered here for the sake of illustration, and discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Moretti formulated his take on world literature in "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000).[26] Given his conviction that world literature is composed not of a limited number of the most representative works – which, having transcended the borders of their own literatures, have entered the league of select classics, but of the works of all times and all nations, Moretti's concept of world literature could be called anti-Goethesit.[27] He applies the method of

[25] Culler 2006: 237, 249.

[26] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review* 1, February 2000.

[27] That is what Zoran Milutinović calls it in his work entitled "Kako napisati istoriju svetske književnosti?" ("How Is The History of World Literature To Be Written?") (Milutinović 2005: 214).

"sociological formalism" (Moretti 2000a: 66) or "comparative morphology" (Moretti 2000a: 64) to this broad understanding of the subject, clearly inspired by the older study of thematics. This means that in his view, world literature should study how "forms" – genres, narrative techniques, and literary tropes – are transformed through space and time; i.e., how they change in relation to the social, cultural, and historical context from which they emerged. Moretti's main thesis is that certain literary traditions occur as a "formal compromise" between the influences of so-called "great" Western literatures, usually French or English, and "local materials", which is to say the content conditioned by the specific horizon of expectations of a given culture (Moretti 2000a: 58). Still, Moretti's concept of world literature contains a new idea. Contending with a discipline that had proliferated in the period between Goethe and Murakami, Moretti came up with the idea to replace the standard method of formalist criticism, i.e. the method of close reading, with the method of second-hand reading, i.e. distant reading. The latter method implies that most of the texts forming the object of study of this concept of world literature would simply not be read by comparatists because someone else, specialists of national literatures, would read them instead and then recapitulate them and highlight their narrative techniques:

> But the trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon […] you invest so much in individual texts *only* if you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very

> seriously—whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is a *condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more. (Moretti 2000a: 57)

Although the idea of a new comparative literature can sometimes seem unappealing and even irrational to literary connoisseurs with traditional tastes, the most confounding aspect of all is how triumphantly the declaration is being made that literature as a unique experience is being wiped off the face of the earth. Culler picked up on this tone in the Bernheimer committee report. Heralding an interdisciplinary "reconception" of the canon and seeking to recruit anthropologists, ethnologists, and political philosophers as professors of comparative literature, the authors of this report seem not to have understood that they were cutting the very bough they were standing on. If they did not foresee the consequences of their own project, there were those – the bursars – who did. Financial administrators saw immediately that large budget savings would be realized by merging comparative literature departments (which no longer had a distinctive object of study) with other departments or seminars. Thence the myriad American, Canadian, and European comparative literature departments which in the last two decades have either shut down or merged with other departments or centers, mostly under the auspices of cultural or interdisciplinary studies. Wachtel sees the main

reason for the change to the infrastructure of comparative studies in American universities to be the fact that comparatists themselves devalued their own discipline by having oriented themselves first towards theory and then towards multiculturalism and interdisciplinary studies. He writes:

> We have now reached a point, in the American academy at least, in which it is almost impossible to imagine that any literature department would or even could hire anyone who wishes to focus in an exclusively literary topic. And the students we bring in to study find it strange and quaint (if not downright annoying) that if they are interested in Shakespeare, Gender and British Politics of the late 16th Century, they should be asked to take a seminar on James Joyce (Wachtel 2005:122).

THE RENAISSANCE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

But there is an epilogue to the story of comparative literature. In the most recent report on the state of the discipline compiled in 2004 by Saussy, a professor of comparative literature and East Asian languages and literatures, the fate of our discipline is viewed from a rather unusual angle.[28] In the opening chapter, Saussy writes somewhat ironically that the first decades of the 21st century showed that there is life after death for comparative literature after all: while it may be true that comparative literature programs are dwindling at American universities, this is because the once-controversial ideas propagated by the discipline finally prevailed beyond its confines, encroaching upon literary studies at large.

[28] This report was not written by a committee of several members but edited by Saussy, who invited a dozen or so comparatists to write position papers on the state of the discipline. Another group of authors was then invited to comment on those papers. All of the papers from that discussion were compiled in a book by the title of *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, 2006.

Saussy writes that in a sense, comparative literature has won the battle: "The premises and protocols characteristic of our discipline are now the daily currency of coursework, publishing, hiring and coffee-shop discussion. Authors and critics who wrote in 'foreign languages' are now taught […] in departments of English! The 'transnational' dimension of literature and culture is universally recognized even by the specialists who not long ago suspected comparatists of dilettantism. […] The controversy is over. Comparative literature is not only legitimate: now, as often as not, ours is the first violin that sets the tone for the rest of the orchestra. Our conclusions have become other people's assumptions." (Saussy 2006a: 3) Comparatists, Saussy writes, have become "universal and anonymous donors". That there seems to be some bitterness in this rather morbid metaphor is confirmed by Saussy's conclusion. Though comparatists have an ethically glorious role to play, he writes, their everyday toil has not brought them any tangible benefits in the form of academic recognition, reliable sources of funding, or even institutional legitimacy.

Turning to the past – to Madame de Staël and Goethe, Saussy continues to identify the main causes of this predicament. In his opinion, most to blame is the fact that comparative literature, having passed through a series of crises and transformations, lost the one feature that distinguished it as a discipline: its "comparative reflex" (Saussy 2006a: 5). Saussy, like Wellek before him, considers the heyday of comparative literature to have been when the object of literary study was literary technique, in other words, when literary study focused on the idea of "literariness" as outlined in works by Roman Jakobson, Shklovsky, and other Russian formalists. According to Saussy, it is not hard to understand why literariness became the core concept of a discipline as "cosmopolitan" as comparative literature. "Literariness" is understood by Russian formalists as the

devices or form of a literary work. Considering that literariness is concerned with form, which is to say the universal "transnational" aspect of a literary work, it represents "the common factor in all literary traditions", which makes it an ideal subject for comparative study:

> The cases of critics as different [...] as Shklovskij, Jakobson, and de Man show the power and attractiveness for comparative literature of a concept of "literariness," however variously it may be put to work. It is not a concept for which national and linguistic frontiers or historical epochs matter much, so it promises to wave aside many of the standard objections to comparative research. […] "literariness," as a differential concept correlated with ordinary language, creates an object of research for comparative literature through a modal argument: not that all literariness is alike, but that instances of literariness differ from instances of banal language in the same ways, is its message. The modal character of literariness makes it robust and context-independent, exactly what an expanding research project ought to be. (Saussy 2006a: 16, 17)

But comparative literature itself questioned literariness as its true object of study as it developed over time. Throwing the doors wide open to various theories and cultural studies, comparative literature renounced literature as its sole – and even preferred – object of research. The resultant "broadened" perspectives could not be catered to by the concept of literariness. Recognizing the centrality of this concept to comparative literature, Saussy considers that in order to reinstate it both methodologically and institutionally, and restore its former glory and influence, a new, similar term needs to be coined that would not pertain only to written texts, which is to say, on imaginative literature. Of course, in order to cover the new directions the field of comparative study has taken in the past two decades, such a term would have to be far more broadly-defined than

"literariness". "Culture" seems to suggest itself, given that it already circulates broadly in variations of "new comparative literature". But although Saussy considers an alliance between comparative literature and cultural studies to be not only practicable but constructive and welcome, he still rejects the notion of "culture" as a substitute for literariness, because it is also limited in an evaluative and historical sense.

What is unique to comparative literature? What does it offer that other disciplines do not? How might a defense for the formation of departments dedicated to this type of study be formulated? According to Saussy, if we want to secure an institutional future for our discipline, we must find an answer to these questions. He sees the uniqueness of comparative literature in *metadisciplinarity*, i.e. in its "openness to new objects and forms of inquiry". Metadisciplinarity, while being another name for interdisciplinarity – which Saussy does not deny, is also interdisciplinarity viewed from a different angle. Because comparative literature has always lacked a permanent object of study, it has taken a methodologically ambivalent position: when it mediates between disciplines, it is *interdisciplinary*; when it places itself "above" disciplines with determinate fields and canons, exhibiting "an openness to lateral linkages and nomothetic generalizations", it is *metadisciplinary* (Saussy 2006a: 23-24). In Saussy's view, its ability to function on both metadisciplinary and interdisciplinary levels is an unrivalled feature which could be pitched as its main selling point to university policy makers, and also restores hope for its future in today's age of globalization.

It is easy to concur with Saussy that the glory days of comparative literature were when "literariness" was the focus of study and literary works were approached through a very broad understanding of formalism. His suggestion

that the current crisis of comparative literature could be mitigated by replacing literariness with a similar term also seems convincing – if too little, too late. But Saussy is mistaken about one thing: if the concept of literariness contributed to the rise of the comparative study of literature, this was not because it was understood as being "transnational" or "modal"; in other words, a mere technical concept that could be employed in the study of different national literatures, traditions, and cultures. In the meaning given to it by Russian Formalists, literariness is primarily defined as the specific characteristics of a work that make it literary. By making literariness central to the discipline, comparative literature showed that the true object of its study was literature *as literature*, which is to say, it was most interested in those aspects of a literary work that make it literary. Saussy acknowledges that when it dealt with the study of literariness, and precisely because it did so, comparative literature was a distinctive and influential discipline (Saussy 2006a: 18, 23). The moment it stopped studying literature as literature and began, under the sway of interdisciplinary strategies, to turn towards cultural studies, comparative literature lost its unique identity and legitimate standing at universities. While the conclusion speaks for itself, Wellek formulated it particularly well in a passage from "Crisis of Comparative Literature":

> Literary scholarship today needs primarily a realization of the need to define its subject matter and focus. It must be distinguished from the study of the history of ideas, or religious and political concepts and sentiments which are often suggested as alternatives to literary studies. Many eminent men in literary scholarship and particularly in comparative literature are not really interested in literature at all but in the history of public opinion, the reports of travelers, the ideas about national character – in short, in general cultural history. The concept of literary study is broadened by them so

> radically that it becomes identical with the whole history of humanity. But literary scholarship will not make any progress, methodologically, unless it determines to study literature as a subject distinct from other activities and products of man. Hence we must face the problem of "literariness," the central issue of aesthetics, the nature of art and literature. (Wellek 1965: 293)

Although Wellek wrote that conclusion half a century ago, it requires no further explanation. The comparative study of literature must again return to its true object of study, literature, and to its most abiding and valuable attributes. And it must do this not only for the benefit of the discipline, but for the benefit of us all.

INTERDISCIPLINARY COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

OPIUM FOR THE MASSES

The new practice of comparative literature actively seeks the abolition or at least the radical revision of the traditional canon of world literature. The canon is traditionally understood to represent a collection of the classic, so best and most representative, works of different periods and national literatures which form the basis of all comparative, theoretical, and historical literary study. A common argument used in support of the new demands is that in the last century or two, since Goethe put forth his idea of *Weltliteratur* in a conversation with Eckermann, and since Villemain delivered a course of lectures on comparative literature at the Sorbonne, the study of literature as a whole has rested upon a very limited number of works, a mere few hundred, which is hardly an accurate sample of all that has been written in the world. What is more, these canonical works were the required reading not only of critics and writers but anyone who was at all literate: educating the citizens of the world in literacy. Although the canon was largely comprised of works from a small number of "great"

literatures – ancient Greek, Roman, Italian, French, English, Spanish, German, and Russian – this limited selection of works was equated with the concept of "world literature", and the canonical writers and books were understood as belonging to a universal, not merely national, legacy.

It is of course unfair to regard world literature as a select but limited canon because "world literature" is literally a far broader concept than "canon". But the traditional idea behind the canon can be justified in another sense: world literature is a collection of works that entered the canon not because of their geographic place of origin but chiefly because of their value. This, as we have seen, may be said to be in the spirit of Goethe.[1] In other words, from a Goethean perspective, the adjective "world" in the phrase in question expresses the idea that some works belong to all of mankind through their artistic value and that, like Michelangelo's sculptures, Vermeer's paintings, or Beethoven's compositions, they make a contribution to humanity at large, not just to a single national culture or a specific period in history. This is what the founders of modern comparative literature – Auerbach, Curtius, and Wellek – understood world literature to mean. In their view, world literature, from Homer to the present, is a unified whole that forms a system or hierarchy of values. But the fathers of comparative literature had no illusions about the bearing of literary values on the modern, globalized world. In one of Auerbach's final essays, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*"" (1957), anticipating the demise of a Goethean understanding of world literature together with the world that had produced it, he predicted the birth of a new age in which traditional humanistic disciplines like philology and comparative literature would no longer have "practical significance". Auerbach cites as a main reason for their decline the "standardization" that has

[1] See above, pp. 45-48.

dominated the world since the Cold War era, which is to say the leveling of all values both in culture at large and in literature.[2] According to Auerbach, "standardization" would necessarily lead to the disappearance of world literature in the traditional sense of these words – leading also to the end of the approach to the study of literature that he advocated and demonstrated in his own works.

It is thus necessary now to examine the remaining objections frequently directed at traditional notions of world literature by adherents of the dissolution of the canon. These objections maintain that the traditional canon is not only too narrow but far too elitist. It is exclusionary in a geographical and cultural-political sense. What is more, the standards within the canon are set too high, which results in authors, genres, periods, and even entire national literatures being systematically excluded from world literature: in Moretti's account, this amounts to almost 99 per cent of all works ever written. These are the main tenets of the approach seeking to replace the old, elitist canon of world literature with a "multicultural " canon, which is to say a large number of various canons that would encompass, for example, "lesser" and forgotten writers from "little" and insufficiently researched literatures. This would mean that instead of having a single narrow and elitist canon, a larger number of smaller and more democratic canons would be established: the women's canon, queer canon, postcolonial canon, etc. Practically speaking, this would mean that in the study of French literature, for example, precedence would no longer be given to Racine, Molière, Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Proust, because in the place of what had once been prescribed by the traditional canon, it would now be possible to study Francophone writers from French-speaking countries, like Canada,

[2] Auerbach 2009: 116. See below, pp. 222-223.

Belgium, Chad, Burundi, Rwanda, and Madagascar, who have become part of the Francophone canon. The principle on which this substitution stands can be aptly summed up by the motto of the Francophone lands that reads: *égalité*, *complémentarité*, *solidarité*. A person can swap Hugo's *Les Orientales*, Balzac's *Illusions perdues,* and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* for any other work from French-speaking territories simply on the grounds that those works are representative not of the literary values related to an elitist understanding of the "paradise of beauty" but of social facts that reflect equality, complementarity, and solidarity among people and nations.

Many factors contributed to the demise of the traditional canon, traditional comparative literature, and the traditional understanding of the humanities in general. Apart from the most obvious, which Auerbach pointed to – the "standardization" and leveling of values, there is a host of more specific and divergent reasons, including practical considerations surrounding, for example, the politics of academic hiring or the design of literary studies curricula. While an exhaustive analysis of these factors cannot be presented here, it should be stressed that they have little to do with pure literary standards.[3] Those who seek to destroy the canon are predominantly advocates of cultural studies or new comparative literature who support an interdisciplinary approach to literature, which in practice usually means applying methods of the social or even natural sciences to the study of literature.

Notwithstanding the bid to establish alternative canons which have already gained ascendancy in interdisciplinary studies, an even more radical suggestion is being made in works of contemporary comparative literature for required reading to be abolished altogether because, as such

[3] For more on this, see above, pp. 10-15.

studies often point out, the list has reached epic proportions. Two such proposals will be examined here by way of illustration, those of Moretti and Pierre Bayard, and will be referred to as *theories of not reading*. They may be compared because while their assumptions and methods differ, their implications are similar. Moretti's approach is eclectic and can generally be classified as scientistic as it draws heavily on methods borrowed from the natural and social sciences, above all Darwinian evolutionism and sociological quantitative methods. On the other hand, Bayard's work is not strictly theoretical but centers on the hackneyed prejudice that too much reading is a bad thing, in other words, as T. S. Eliot explains, "much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility".[4] According to Bayard, reading is a subjective activity *par excellence*, performed chiefly for the freedom to engage in "self-invention" in relation to a work of art. The view that reading is a creative act or subjective "writing", to put it in Derridean terms, stems from Lacanian psychoanalysis and a deconstructionist approach to literature. Challenging the structuralist approach to literature and taking issue with the idea of text as a structure that has an "objective" meaning, independent of the meaning a reader projects onto it, deconstructionist criticism understands text as intertext, as a "space" in which various "traces" of other texts and discourses converge. By contrast to the traditional understanding of the concept of text, intertext does not have a given or "objective" meaning and can thus mean anything that a reader assigns to it. Theories and understandings, including Bayard's, that give primacy to the subjective experience of reading can thus be called impressionistic.

[4] Eliot 2005:154. Considering that Eliot sees the poet's craft as "a continual extinction of personality" and "a continual surrender of [the poet] … to something which is more valuable", he would find a subjective approach to reading like Bayard's reprehensible. That said, he does not deliver an invective against such prejudice but merely cites it as an example of an absurd argument.

Although departing from different standpoints, Moretti and Bayard reach the same conclusion: to read well means that readers are to maintain a distance from the text before them, and to refrain from reading in a literal sense of the word. Moretti and Bayard's approaches differ in that, whereas for Bayard, distance from a text prompts readers to write new texts in which they express their "poetic sensibility", for Moretti, this distance is prerequisite to an understanding of the larger literary forms (genres, genre systems, etc.) and the laws that govern their evolution. In this respect, Moretti's and Bayard's theories are both examples of what may be termed *untextual* criticism, which can be said to be an entirely new phenomenon in the evolution of literary theory. In *untextual* criticism, "reading well" is almost the same thing as not reading at all.

It seems pertinent here to present an overview of this theoretical agenda before delving into it in more detail. This overview can be encapsulated in a series of questions: Why would a bibliophobe bother to deal with literature? Why would such a one write (in books, no less) about books and talk about books, or teach literature? Why not teach sociology or open a psychoanalytic practice; why not study animal species on the Galapagos Islands? Why pursue literature if inimical to finding meaning in poetry as poetry and the experience of reading poetry as such? Machiavelli wrote that he would bathe and don clean robes before taking a work by a classical writer into his hands. Even if it is conceded that such rituals appear absurd in the digital age, surely it is not too much to ask that literature professors – which Moretti and Bayard are: at Stanford and the Sorbonne – should enjoy reading books or, short of that, not be strangers to the singular pleasure afforded by reading poetry? That experience is at once the necessary premise and ultimate aim of all consideration of literature. Theories like Moretti's and Bayard's, which abound today, suggest that

the love of literature as literature together with an awareness of the uniqueness of the reading experience and the importance of researching it in that vein have become lost in the museum of outmoded technologies. In contemporary interdisciplinary studies, literature is hardly studied as literature anymore and is studied instead as an expression of social conditions, ideologies, or worldviews.

Proceeding to define the tasks of new literary history, Moretti writes in the introductory chapter to his first book *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (1983)[5] that the time has come for literary history to abandon the study of "the purity of form" and turn to the study of literature as a social institution. The traditional theory of literature – or at least Moretti's understanding of it as variations of more or less formalist text-based criticism – separates literature from life, enclosing it in a kind of "theoretical limbo". It brings literature acceptance and respect but no practical use. Moretti writes that the time has come for such elitism to be questioned and for all literary privileges rooted in aesthetics to be revoked. Essentially, literature is but one of many social phenomena and institutions: "It means re-routing the tasks of literary historiography and the image of literature itself, enclosing them both in the idea of consent, stability, repetition, bad taste even. It means, in other words, turning the ultimate paradise – the paradise of 'beauty' – into a social institution like the others." (Moretti 2006: 12)

An example of Auerbachian "standardization", Moretti's concept of literary history is not especially complicated and requires no explication. It revives an approach that had been successfully rejected a century ago by various schools of formalist criticism, and also by structuralism. The approach

[5] The title is taken from a verse in Eliot's poem "Gerontion": "Signs are taken for wonders. 'We should see a sign!'"

in question is literary-historical positivism: Moretti's theory shares not only its assumptions and methods but also its greatest flaws. This will be explored in more detail further on. For now, attention will be turned to an unusual word in the excerpt cited above which is better suited to a political speech than the language of "literary heaven". Moretti writes that literary history, and so, by extension, literature itself, should be approached from the standpoint of "consent", which may come as a surprise until it is remembered that he has a Marxist pedigree. As Moretti has it, the "substantial function" of literature is to "secure consent", which is to say to "make individuals feel 'at ease' in the world they happen to live in, to reconcile them in a pleasant and imperceptible way to its prevailing cultural norms" (Moretti 2006: 27). Of course, this applies only to the capitalist societies of the West, where Moretti assigns to literature the role that had been ascribed to religion in *The Communist Manifesto*: that of the opiate of the masses.

Moretti's views on the function of literature in society reveal traces of the old, if somewhat modified, reflection theory. In the introduction to his book *The Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (1996), Moretti calls his approach to literature that of a "half sociologist … half formalist" and writes that "literature *follows* great social changes – that it always 'comes after'". He adds, "To come after, however, does not mean to repeat ('reflect') what already exists". To the contrary, and this is where Moretti departs from the orthodox socialist-realist theory of literature as "reflection", literature is "to *resolve* the problems set by history" (Moretti 1996: 6). Every change, which is to say even social change, is followed by a series of overloads and transformations to the symbolic perception of the world. In other words, the consequences of social revolutions, including evolution, are not only economic but also ethical, ideological,

and psychological. On the collective level, they can threaten "social cohesion", and on the individual level, they can induce fatigue.

In Moretti's view, the role of literature is to eliminate that burden: literature brings release from strain, and relief from historical and social tension; it can help us better understand society and the historical moment in which we live and thus better come to terms with our historical fate. Last but not least, literature pacifies our political leanings because, in Moretti's opinion, its sole purpose is to teach us to resign ourselves to "power relations", even with the violence that results from those relations (Moretti 1996: 6). In other words, literature has no effect on either the life of the individual or society; it is but an expression of social forces, one of the many means used by society to placate the masses and coax them into obedience and unity. Seen from this angle, literature is not much different from games of chance, show business, or televised reality programs. Although Moretti distances himself from reflection theory, he actually remains within its framework because he adopts its basic assumptions, according to which the total cultural-artistic production of a society, i.e. that which Marxism called the "superstructure" and which is conditioned by the "base", is shaped by the relationship between economics and politics. This can be seen in the fact that Moretti believes that literary evolution follows social change: the transformation of symbolic structures like literature, art, and culture in general is the necessary consequence of changes to the social system. Moretti has consistently advanced this viewpoint: beginning with his first book, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, in which he presents his theory of literary evolution in the chapters, "The Soul and the Harpy: Reflections on the Aims and Methods of Literary Historiography" and "On Literary Evolution", through *Modern Epic* and *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (1998), to his more recent

book, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005).[6]

Bibliophilism is not Bayard's forte, either. In the preface to his book, he writes: "Born into a milieu where reading was rare, deriving little pleasure from the activity, and lacking in any case the time to devote myself to it … Because I teach literature at the university level, there is, in fact, no way to avoid commenting on books that most of the time I haven't even opened. … I am regularly called on to discuss publications in my books and articles, since these for the most part concern the books and articles of others" (Bayard 2008: 11). Two things may be concluded from this. First, that reading and writing are tedious chores which are the necessary concomitants of being a university professor and, second, that the motive behind the devotion to literature has nothing to do with a love of reading poetry but is far more prosaic, stemming from the desire to win the reputation or authority conferred by the status of professor, or the reverence people have for erudition – whether genuine or feigned. Of course, it could be said that the passage cited, considered within the context of Bayard's book, was written ironically and is in fact a parody of a certain professorial type encountered in academic settings. But even if that is true, it is of no theoretical significance because there is a point to polemicizing with the thesis of the advantages of not reading that Bayard advances throughout his book, regardless of his authorial intent.

But to return to the initial question: Why deal with literature if one is not disposed to reading? And why write about books that one has not read? Is there any reward

[6] Moretti takes the same view in the works, "Conjectures on World Literature" and "The Slaughterhouse of Literature", published in 2000. Chapters most directly related to Moretti's theory of literary evolution in *Modern Epic* are the Introduction and the first chapter of part one, "Faust and the Nineteenth Century", and in *Atlas of the European Novel*, the introduction entitled, "Towards a Geography of Literature".

greater for literary work than reading? A literal implementation of Bayard's and Moretti's practice of not reading would bring about nothing less than the demise predicted by Auerbach. Writing about world literature in the wake of World War Two, it seemed to Auerbach that the world in which the humanities still had a practical value was slowly disappearing. Today, half a century later, it is clear that traditional humanists like those from the time of Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Curtius, or Auerbach are vanishing together with that world. There are ever fewer passionate readers, people who know the secret of that unparalleled experience and the singular satisfaction it can bring. If this trend continues, there may be no more real readers, only readers of graphic and digest publications; only 'experts' on books unread. But that will also mean that we will lose our past, because all of the literature of the past – the songs, novels, and dramas of bygone authors – will become but arcane monuments like the Druid temples or Mayan pyramids are today; mysteries the meaning of which we will never again be in a position to fathom because we will have forgotten the language in which they address us. Will there be collateral damage to literature's demise?

DISTANT READING

Moretti, whose views will now be examined in more detail, expresses his position on the history of world literature most cogently in "Conjectures on World Literature".[7] Disappointed in the achievements of traditional comparative literature, which he considers to have largely been the product of Germanic and Romance language specialists concentrated primarily on the territory around the Rhine River, Moretti considers that it is time to return to what he believes

[7] The work was published in *New Left Review* 1, Jan.-Feb. 2000, 54-68.

Goethe and later Marx understood by the term *Weltliteratur*. The old ambition of *Weltliteratur* was, in Moretti's opinion, for literature – not the culture that gave rise to it – to be viewed as a "planetary system" (Moretti 2000a: 54).[8] He thinks that the study of world literature is needed more than ever today. But before this study can be undertaken, it is necessary to determine how it is to be practiced. How is the endless array of texts that make up world literature and its history to be reckoned with? How are linguistic and cultural barriers to be overcome? How is knowledge to be gained of the myriad traditions, genres, and literary techniques that have emerged all over the world, over hundreds and hundreds of years? Particularly perplexing is the question of how to contend with the enormous body of "unread" literature – that which never entered the canon and which in Moretti's estimate constitutes more than 99 per cent of all published literature.

In order to answer these questions, Moretti proposes that a new approach be applied to the study of literature, namely the multidisciplinary approach known as world-systems analysis, which is rooted in historical sociology and economic history and views the world as a single system. This macro-scale approach to world history, social change, and economics emphasizes the world-system and not nation states as the focus of study. World-renowned sociologist Wallerstein, who is cited by Moretti, was the leading exponent of this idea, popular in Marxist and Leftist circles.

[8] Moretti's understanding of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* is not entirely accurate. Although Goethe made the claim in conversations with Eckermann that, "National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand" (Eckermann 1970: 182), Goethe did not for a moment reject the idea of national literature as a unique entity. National literature is for Goethe a postulation of world literature, which he understands to be a collection of exemplary works from different literatures chosen primarily for their literary value, but which is also to contribute to a "better understanding between nations". Prendergast rightly points to this in his criticism of Moretti (see: Prendergast 2001: 3).

According to Wallerstein, a world-system (such as capitalism) is a unified system that can extend across the globe. But the system is not homogeneous. It is asymmetrical, "one but unequal", because the division of labor divides the world-system into three sub-systems or three special zones, the "core", "periphery", and "semi-periphery". These zones are "bound together in a relationship of growing inequality" (Moretti 2000a: 56). Core countries focus on higher skill and capital-intensive production while the remaining countries, those of the periphery and semi-periphery, focus on low-skill, labor-intensive production, and the exploitation of natural resources. The unequal relationship strengthens the dominance of core countries, which are currently the highest developed countries in the Atlantic region, i.e. Western Europe and North America. However, because of the dynamic characteristics of the system, nations or states can lose their core status over time and regress into the periphery of the system, which has happened before. Building on the ideas of Fernand Braudel,[9] Wallerstein emphasizes that his world-system approach is not a theory but a multidisciplinary framework of analysis. As Marx had once, Wallerstein considers the global expansion of the capitalist economy to be detrimental to a large segment of the world's population and that the moment will come when capitalism will be replaced by socialism.

Drawing an analogy with the view of the world as a unified economic system, Moretti defines world literature as: "one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal" (Moretti 2000a: 56). Moretti forwarded the same concept

[9] The view of the world as a single system developed in the strand of historiography known as "world history". The approach was spearheaded by a group of historians, chief among them Braudel, associated with the Annales School in France.

of world literature in his best-known and most-read book, *Atlas of the European Novel*. In the third part of that work, "Narrative Markets, ca. 1850", in which he advances his conception of the sociology of literature, Moretti distinguishes "three Europes" or, more specifically, three groups of European literatures. The first, smallest, and most developed group represents the "core" in a Wallersteinian sense and plays the leading role in world literature because it produces the majority of new literary forms and generates literary evolution. The group of "peripheral" literatures is the largest, "but with very little freedom and little creativity". In Moretti's opinion, literature from the periphery largely adopts and imitates the genres, techniques, and literary styles that emerge from the literary capitals. The literature of the semi-periphery lies between those two poles. It represents a "hybrid cluster", which has characteristics of both the "core" and "periphery". It is "an area of transition", an area of development between two opposite positions: one that absorbs the "great" literatures when they decline out of the "core", as was the case with 19th century Italian and Spanish literature, and the other that ascends into the "core", as was the case with the Russian novel of the 19th century (Moretti 1998: 173).[10]

[10] In his most recent book *Distant Reading*, Moretti writes that Wallerstein's conception of the world as a single system has its limitations when applied to the study of literature. Responding to Jérôme David's criticism that the "periphery" in the "symbolic economy" of a literary world system does not have the same function it does in an economic world system (which is to say it does not serve as a cheap source of labor), Moretti concedes: "But if the (literary) periphery is not necessary to the existence of the (literary) core, then only *half* of Wallerstein's model can be fruitfully applied to literature; and is a half-model still a model – or no model at all? I am not sure; but if it were the latter, as I suspect, then the only response to David's critique would consist in repeating a sentence of 'More Conjectures' that addressed a different set of objections: 'Here things are easy: Parla and Arac are right – and I should have known better.'" (Moretti 2013: 108)

Developing the idea of three Europes, Moretti writes in "Conjectures on World Literature" that the "asymmetry in international power" (Moretti 2000a: 56) impacts not just the economy but also the literatures of some cultures. The literatures from the periphery and semi-periphery are subordinated to the literatures belonging to the "core" (called "great" literatures by traditional comparatists) that rule the global literary market. Innovations such as new genres and stylistic devices first appear in the "core" countries and are then reflected as an external influence which is somewhat modified in peripheral literatures. Not only do "small" literatures have almost no influence on the development of literature in the epicenter, but "great" literatures can disregard the peripheral literatures they influence (Moretti 2000a: 56). Moretti's view of the system of world literature could be criticized from the perspective of systems theory: if something is a system, then all of its elements, whether dominant or subordinate, must influence the system; in other words, they have to interact or interrelate to shape it as a whole because otherwise it would not be a system. But more interesting than this is another aspect of Moretti's concept of "world literature", which, as seen above, he understands very broadly as the collection of all of the works ever written by all of the peoples in the world.[11]

Moretti applies the historical method to this broadly conceived field of study, which in "Conjectures" he calls "a new critical method", "sociological formalism", and "comparative morphology" (Moretti 2000a: 64, 66). In his view,

[11] Moretti's concept of world literature could be called anti-Goethean, though he would likely disagree with such an assessment. It is anti-Goethean not so much because it sees world literature as an asymmetric system but because it sees world literature as comprising all of the works ever written by all of the nations in the world as opposed to a very limited number of exemplary works that have transcended the borders of their respective national literatures to join the ranks of select classics, which is how Goethe saw it.

the history of world literature studies how "forms" – particular genres or narrative techniques – are transformed through time and space as they spread from "core" to "periphery"; in other words, it studies how "forms" change depending on their social, cultural, and economic context. Moretti's main thesis, which he encapsulates in the example of literary evolution, builds on the fact that literary traditions on the periphery arise as a "formal compromise" between the influences that come from Western literatures, mostly from England or France, and "local material", which is to say content determined by the specific horizon of expectation of a given culture (Moretti 2000a: 58).[12] Although there is nothing new in this view of the evolution of particular genres or world literature in general, Moretti calls it a "new critical method". This "new" approach to literary history is inspired by the study of themes that emerged in the late 19th century: in Russia in the works of Veselovsky, resurrected later in the Soviet Marxist scholarship of Zhirmunsky and Nikolai

[12] In *Atlas*, Moretti writes of both the "European model" and "local setting". The form of a given genre originates in the "core" and essentially remains unchanged on its journey to "peripheral" literatures. Only certain extrinsic generic features, which Moretti calls "details", are subject to change. For example, in the historical novel, which is an important subject in Moretti's *Atlas*, plot remains constant and "'British'", while characters change and are given "local" attributes (1998: 193). However, in his most recent book *Distant Reading*, which was written as a response to criticism he had received for his theory of distant reading, but also on other accounts from various critics (Prendergast, Jonathan Arac, Efrain Kristal, Apter, etc.), Moretti somewhat modifies his claim. He still asserts that the novel's plot remains the same as it travels from the core to the periphery, but now writes that at the periphery "style … changes", which is to say "a new stylistic register" is produced: "The realist-naturalist plot of lost illusions and social defeat reaches the periphery of the literary system more or less intact; but in the course of the journey, it becomes somehow detached from the 'serious' tone that used to accompany it, and is joined to a new stylistic register" (Moretti 2013: 132). Moretti does not cite any concrete examples, besides the general ones (Italian, Brazilian, Japanese, Filipino literature, etc.), that would support his claim.

Konrad via the theory of stadialism, and in Germany in the literary discipline of *Stoffgeschichte*. Still, Moretti's conception of world literature does contain an undeniable innovation: the proposition that close reading, which is the standard method of formalist criticism and thus of literary criticism in general, be replaced by distant reading. That this is the chief heuristic method of the "new" critical approach to literary history implies that most of the texts under study will simply not be read except by specialists of national literatures who will sum them up and identify their forms, genres, and stylistic devices. Historians of world literature will need only to synthesize, like Wallerstein does in the patchwork of comparative social history constituting his work, which Moretti notes with approval is largely comprised of quotations (Moretti 2000a: 57) and serves as a model for the literary field:

> The trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon […] You invest so much in individual texts *only* if you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise – very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously – whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance […] is a *condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for

> theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more. (Moretti 2000a: 57-58)

In support of his thesis on distant reading, Moretti cites Max Weber, according to whom "[abstract] concepts are primarily analytical instruments for the intellectual mastery of empirical data" (Moretti 2000a: 58). Moretti considers the need for such instruments to increase exponentially with the size of the field being studied and implies that they are necessary to the study of a field as large as the history of world literature. It may be true that abstract ideas, as analytical instruments, can assist in the analysis and mastery of extensive empirical data. But what holds for sociology, economics, or history in general does not necessarily hold for literature. The question remains as to whether abstract ideas do in fact contribute to an understanding of data, if by data is meant particular literary works – especially if, as Moretti suggests, we have not previously read those works. Even if it is conceded that analytical instruments in the form of abstract ideas can have an explicative value in literary studies, albeit different from their value in the social sciences, it does not necessarily follow that they are more important than the "data" they refer to.

What is the purpose of literary studies? To explicate analytical instruments and formulate theories or to attempt to understand what is unique to a literary work? An application can be found for the aphorism "less is more" that Moretti cites more enthusiastically than with actual comprehension: it encapsulates the style of minimalist architecture made famous by Mies van der Rohe, but has no historical or theoretical foothold in the study of literature. Literature is one thing, but the study of literature is another altogether, and when it comes to the latter, less is ultimately less. Moretti's idea of distant reading would be

more accurately epitomized by the old quip, "The operation was successful, but the patient died." And this begs the earlier question: why write a history of *literature* if averse to reading?[13]

As Moretti sees it, the advantages of the "new" literary history and its method of distant reading are manifold. Above all, it challenges the view that national literatures are independent, self-enclosed organisms and allows literary history to be considered in a global framework. Additionally, "second-hand reading makes it possible for objective, scientific methods like experimentation to be applied to the study of literature. Moretti begins his experiments by first defining the unit that is to be studied. The unit is to be as small as possible: it could be a device, a trope, or a limited narrative unit.[14] Moretti then "follow[s] its metamorphoses in a variety of environments", i.e. in different national literatures, but not by reading the original works himself but by studying them second hand, through the works of "local" literary historians. Second-hand reading saves him time and enables him to "cover" an immensely vast field of research, practically all of world literature. In "Conjectures", Moretti cites as an example of this experiment his own research on the rise of the modern novel, by which he means the novel from 1750 to 1950, and its diffusion from English and French literature to various "peripheral" literatures: Russian, Polish, Turkish, Japanese,

[13] In *Distant Reading*, Moretti seems to disassociate himself from his controversial project. Responding to criticism that he received from the "left" and the "right", Moretti explains that this "fatal formula" had been added later to his paper ("Conjectures"), where he had initially used the phrase "serial reading": "Partly, it was meant as a joke; a moment of relief in a rather relentless argument. But no one seems to have taken it as a joke, and they were probably right." (Moretti 2013: 44)

[14] Moretti announces that he will conduct such an experiment in a follow-up work on the concept of "stylistic 'seriousness'", which Auerbach had addressed in *Mimesis*, and trace its metamorphoses in the novels of the 19th and 20th centuries. It appears that he has yet to do so.

Chinese, West African, etc. Following this development, Moretti attempts to point to patterns, or as he puts it, to formulate the "laws of literary evolution", of the novelistic genre. For example, he notes that as a rule in cultures at the "periphery" of the literary system, the novel does not emerge as an autonomous development but rather imports from "great" literatures, and as a result the novel in those literatures is "a compromise between a western formal influence … and local materials" (Moretti 2000a: 58).[15] Moretti also notes that this compromise does not always manifest itself in the same way; it results in different novelistic forms or narrative techniques in the literatures of different cultures. On the basis of this observation, Moretti comes to the conclusion that world literature is indeed a system as he had supposed it to be at the start, except that this system, just like Wallerstein's world capitalist system, is not "uniform" but, on the contrary, comprises variables:

> The pressure from the Anglo-French core tried to make it uniform, but it could never fully erase the reality of difference. (See here, by the way, how the study of world literature is – inevitably – a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world.) The system was one, not uniform. And, retrospectively, of course it had to be like this: if after 1750 the novel arises just about everywhere as a compromise between West European patterns and local reality – well, local reality was different in the various places, just as western influence was also very uneven: much stronger in Southern Europe around 1800, to return to my example, than in West Africa around 1940. The forces in play kept changing, and so did the compromise that resulted from their interaction. (Moretti 2000a: 64)

That there are variables in the system means opportunities for the study of "comparative morphology", which is

[15] Moretti claimed to have traced the "laws" of novelistic evolution in his earlier work, *Atlas of the European Novel*.

to say "the systematic study of how forms vary in space and time". Moretti defers explaining how this type of study is a "complex issue", stating that it requires its own paper. To some extent he made up that deficit in his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, in which he studies how a particular narrative technique from the English and French novel, *free indirect style* (*style indirect libre*), migrates into other European and then world literatures, and combines with local "material" and local forms. This example will be used to illustrate his method of "comparative morphology".

According to Moretti, free indirect style as a special narrative device was used first at the start of the 19th century by Jane Austen (though, it should be added, also by Goethe), and was further developed in Western Europe by Flaubert and Zola. From a linguistic viewpoint, free indirect style is an unusual combination of direct and indirect discourse – of both the narrators' and characters' speech, the function of which is to blur the boundaries between characters' subjective thoughts and emotions on the one hand, and 'objective' narrative on the other. Moretti, referencing Charles Bally, who in the early 20th century was one of the first to describe this narrative technique, writes that the goal of free indirect style is to "transpose the objective into the subjective" and considers it analogous to the "compromise formation" of "socialization" (Moretti 2005: 82). Although he does not explicitly define "socialization", Moretti clearly understands it to be a process whereby individuals, subjected to societal norms, adopt the collective ideology of society as a substitute for subjectivity, i.e. their own thoughts, emotions, and ideas. The evolution of the novel in Western European literature demonstrates how subjectivity became permeated by collective discourse or the social *doxa* drowning out the narrator's voice. In the last stage of the evolution of free indirect style in the 19th century, in the novels of Flaubert and Zola, the reflective consciousness that had

been typical of Austen's heroines was entirely subsumed by the commonplaces of collective ideology. "As can be seen", Moretti writes, "we have the gradual, entropic drift from 'reflective' to 'non-reflective' consciousness: that is to say, from sharp punctual utterances like those in *Mansfield Park*, to Flaubert's all-encompassing moods, where the character's inner space is unknowingly colonized by the commonplaces of public opinion" (Moretti 2005: 82-83). Viewed from this angle, it becomes apparent that the history of the Western European novel of the 19th century, specifically its most significant form – the third person narration in which free indirect style is the dominant technique – attests to the decline in the intellectual assertiveness of the protagonists, to say nothing of the stultification and capitulation of the their reflective consciousness in the face of the commonplaces of imposed ideologies. It should not be necessary to emphasize just how far Moretti's reading is from the intuitive understanding of the psychological range of these novels that is gained from actually reading them.

However, Moretti continues, it is precisely when we think that, "the individual mind seems about to be submerged by ideology" that the journey of the novel to the East brings a reversal, "approach[ing] another branch" in the evolution of free indirect style. In Russia, free indirect style ceases to be the expression of "consensus" between individual consciousness and "'other people's words'", like in Flaubert and Zola; now, it expresses the "conflict" of these instances, which is best demonstrated by the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov. Inspired by Bakhtin's idea of "dialogism", Moretti thinks that Raskolnikov's consciousness is an ongoing battle between "I" and "you", between the protagonist's subjectivity and "'other people's words'" and that in Dostoevsky, free indirect style is modified to suit such "dialogic" norms. Transformed by the effect of dialogue, free indirect style in Dostoevsky becomes

"much more intense and dramatic than ever before" and "one could say, almost dialogic". Moretti concludes that because Dostoevsky oscillated between these two techniques, he ultimately "toned down free indirect style" in order for dialogism to flourish (Moretti 2005: 85).

A special "branching" in the evolution of free indirect style next occurs in the South, Moretti writes, in novels based in small, insular communities in which "collective oral myths" are embedded in the narrative voice (Moretti 2005: 86). To illustrate this variation of free indirect style, Moretti takes recourse to alternative canons, which is to say authors who are less remembered today: the Italian realist Giovanni Verga and an author from a Francophone zone – French Guiana, René Maran. In their novels, the narrators speak for the community they belong to, so the focus of the narrative is not on introspection but on collective discourse and dominant community values (Moretti 2005: 86).

The next transformation of free indirect style emerged not along geographical lines but over time. Moretti claims that at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries another significant change occurred, which manifested itself as "experiment[s] at the opposite end of the spectrum, that of the irreducibly singular" (Moretti 2005: 88). According to Moretti, it was upper-class writers like James, Mann, Proust, and Woolf who were the first to experiment with thought presentation. But in their prose, "the deviation from social norms is often so slight that it may not even form a separate branch" – which is to say, form a separate variation of free indirect style (Moretti 2005: 88). However, Joyce and writers of his generation soon rejected all "stylistic good manners" and embarked on an uninhibited exploration of the "unconscious layers of psychic life". Just as the third person of free indirect style approaches the second person of dialogism to ultimately be displaced

by it in *Crime and Punishment*, "so, in *Ulysses*, the third person is constantly drifting towards, but also yielding to the *first* person of Joyce's chosen technique, the stream of consciousness". Moretti continues "Here, too, cultural 'interbreeding' encountered a barrier that could not be passed" (Moretti 2005: 88).

The last "branching" of the techniques of free indirect style comprises Latin American "'dictator novels'". Moretti uses the term to refer to the political novels of Augusto Roa Bastos, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa, which explore the psychology of authoritarian political leaders through a variety of narrative strategies. Like in *Ulysses*, here, too, the narrative oscillates between the first and third person, but the dynamics of "objective" representation win out. "In the place of a third-person narrative modulating into a first-person monologue," Moretti writes "we see the dictator's attempt to objectify his private (and pathological) self into the monumental poses of a public persona" (Moretti 2005: 89).

The type of "comparative morphology" that Moretti advances in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* is less a "systematic study" of free indirect style than it is a crash course in this narrative technique.[16] Not only is there a lack of systematization in Moretti's study, but almost everything he writes about narrative techniques can justifiably be called into question. As free indirect style is not the primary focus of the present work, it will suffice to say here that Moretti fails both to acknowledge the enormous body of theoretical literature that has been written about this important narrative technique

[16] Although Moretti describes his method as a "comparative morphology" (2005: 90) of literary forms, in practice he mostly deals with the evolution of a single form: the novel, specifically, the type of novel that is commonly classified as genre literature – the Gothic, historical, sentimental, detective novel – withholding any preferential treatment from "High" forms of the novel (2005: 29).

in the past century and to indicate that he is even aware of the complex, long tradition of the study of free indirect style and the many authors before him who have given meticulous attention to questions like those he addresses. Moretti thus betrays an ignorance of elementary theoretical concepts, confusing these and other relatively similar narrative techniques, and what is worse, overlooks the fact that novelists use these techniques differently for semantic and aesthetic, not just formal, reasons. Finally, it needs to be said with all due respect to the alternative canon that the place Maran and Verga occupy in the history of the modern novel and free indirect style is not the same as that which undeniably belongs to Flaubert, James, Proust, Mann, and Woolf. But such oversights are the predictable outcomes of "second hand reading". The programme would not be such a problem if it were only a question of free indirect style. No one can be an expert in everything – although Moretti often explicitly remarks that his area of specialization is the modern novel. The problem is that Moretti's approach to almost everything he takes issue with does not entail an immersion and excessive engagement in reading: it is second hand, as it were.

NEW LITERARY HISTORY

Because the method of second-hand reading was conceived of to serve Moretti's project of "new" literary history, it is necessary to give it further consideration. In the preface to *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Moretti writes that while his study covers "old territory", namely that of literary history, he will take up an entirely new object of study within that territory. Although the book is the most comprehensive presentation of "new" literary history yet published, it contributes nothing that Moretti had not addressed elsewhere.

In his first book, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, he had already formulated the ideas that he would later develop in his literary-historical method. Similar questions are similarly addressed in *The Modern Epic* and *Atlas of the European Novel*, as well as in shorter works, like "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" and the previously mentioned "Conjectures". That said, the focus here will be on *Graphs, Maps, Trees* because in it, Moretti outlines the implications of his views on world literature and as such elucidates both the advantages and disadvantages of his approach. Where necessary, however, his other works will be referenced.

Whereas "old" literary history deals with works and authors, "new" literary history is primarily concerned with the universal, general laws that determine the development of literature as a whole. Moretti explains that the three concepts in the title of the work, *graphs, maps and trees*, borrowed from sociology and geography, represent "a trio of artificial constructs" which make possible the "deliberate reduction and abstraction" of literary texts in order to draw attention to the multi-level foundations of literary evolution on a global scale (Moretti 2005: 1).

Although Moretti stressed the novelty of this approach, this was not the first time he had employed graphs, maps, and other diagrams. He first used them as analytical resources in *Atlas of the European Novel*, which brought him great acclaim and would explain at least in part why he pursued similar strategies again, although it should be noted that *Graphs, Maps, Trees* did not enjoy the same success as his earlier work. The earlier work is also set apart because Moretti had not yet discovered the advantages of second-hand reading in *Atlas*, which meant that his approach was still traditional and text based, and the maps in it were aids that served to "dissect the text in an unusual way" and "[bring] to light relations that would otherwise remain

hidden" (Moretti 1998: 3). Departing from the assumption that all literary genres have a particular "geography" or (in Bakhtinian terms) chronotope, Moretti uses maps to present the view of literary structures which forms the object of his study. For example, his maps clearly indicate that the plots of Austen's sentimental novels unfold in the idyllic landscapes of Southern England, that the historical novels of Walter Scott transpire in Scotland and northern England, in locations far removed from city centers, and that all "overstimulated" influences in Russian novels come from the West, which is to say from England, France, and Germany. Every genre "possesses its own space and each space its own genre", Moretti writes (Moretti 1998: 35). In the novel, geography points to a deeper meaning, so the fact that the plot in Scott's novels often takes place in border and transit territories indicates the "erasure [of the border], and of the incorporation of the internal periphery into the larger unit of the state" (Moretti 1998: 38).

While the view of literature afforded by the use of graphs in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* is not entirely novel, as they are employed to the same effect in Moretti's other works, they nonetheless have a distinct function in this work. Moretti's attention in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, rather than being directed only to literary forms and their significance, is directed to what lies behind them and what produces them: namely, social relations. He writes that the form of a literary work reveals certain dynamics of social relations, and the task of "literary sociology" is to deduce "from the *form* of an object the *forces* that have been at work" (Moretti 2005: 57). Thus his primary interest lies not in literature, per se, but in social changes which are manifested in various ways, literature being one of them. A case in point is the village story, which was among the most popular literary genres in 19th century England, which initially adopted the familiar features of the traditional idyll. The plots unfold in very

limited, self-enclosed spaces, far from the city, where the protagonists derive pleasure from taking long walks and not doing much of anything. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, the genre's form changes. The outer world, in the form of the hostile city and more specifically the railroad tracks, represents an increasing threat to the village idlers, and already in the 1830s, the chronotope of the village story begins to disintegrate and the genre disappears from print (Moretti 2005: 60-64). On the basis of that analysis, Moretti comes to the conclusion that in the development of every genre, there "comes a moment when its inner form can no longer represent the most significant aspects of contemporary reality". Moretti adds that at that point, "either the genre loses its form under the impact of reality, thereby disintegrating, or it betrays reality in the name of form, becoming, in Shklovsky's words, a 'dull epigone'" (Moretti 2005: 63, see also pp. 17).

Leaving aside the question of the appropriateness of citing Shklovsky, whose ideas on literary evolution were diametric to Moretti's reductionism, it is obvious why Moretti calls the method of his "new" literary history the "sociology of symbolic forms" and imagines it part of the "total history of society" (Moretti 2006: 19). His approach in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, like his conception of world literature, is closer to the sociology of literature than to literary theory, in the traditional sense of that term. The task of history conceived in this way is not to interpret "events", i.e. literary works, nor to discover autonomous laws of literary evolution, like Shklovsky and other Russian formalists had set out to do, but to reconstruct the "mentalités", or, more restrictively, the ideologies of cultural and sociological groups, as manifested in literature (Moretti 2005: 19). Like Moretti's earlier books, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* draws on eclectic sociological theories, including those of Galvano Della Volpe (whom he cites as a major influence),

Karl Mannheim, and Max Weber, as well as Wallerstein and other contemporary Marxists. But the patchwork of other people's ideas that Moretti cites on almost every page of his books eschews his fundamental theoretical postulate, which is not much of a departure from the Marxist view of literature as part of the social "superstructure": for Moretti, neither individual literary works nor literary genres have a meaning that is independent of the ideology of the society that produces them.

What is more, and very much in keeping with the spirit of Marxism, the main reason Moretti borrows methods from other disciplines is in order to more elaborately formulate reductionist arguments that demote literature to a mere expression of economic and social conditions. Accurate data on the number of novels published in a given country over time, or of books imported by colonies, are but the preamble to a sociological interpretation of literature that reduces it to a component of the "superstructure". "Quantitative data", Moretti writes, "can tell us when Britain produced one new novel per month or week, or day, or hour for that matter, but where the significant turning points lie along the continuum – and why – is something that must be decided on a different basis" (Moretti 2005: 9). So, for example, the unexpected surge in imports of English books into India following the Indian Rebellion of 1857 is interpreted as "a sign of Britain suddenly accelerating the pace of symbolic hegemony" (Moretti 2005: 12), with a complete disregard for other possible explanations, just like trends of novelistic production in certain countries and shifts in novelistic genres in general are explained in exclusively political and economic terms.

In the third, final chapter of *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, entitled "Trees", Moretti's patchwork approach takes on another important dimension. Further fortifying his

interdisciplinary position, Moretti supplements the quantitative-sociological method used in the first two chapters of his book with Darwin's theory of evolution. Moretti explicitly states that the graphs representing the evolution of literary forms in "Trees" were made after the diagram Darwin used in *The Origin of the Species* to illustrate the process of natural selection. Moretti calls these diagrams "morphological diagrams" or "evolutionary trees" because they show how form evolves through history: how "history is systematically correlated with form" (Moretti 2005: 69). In other words, while in "Graphs", statistical diagrams demonstrate the results of Moretti's quantitative research, and in "Maps", geographical charts show the movement of stylistic devices across terrain, the trees in the third chapter show how form, genre, and technique develop over time, through history: "And indeed, in contrast to literary studies – where theories of form are usually blind to history, and historical work blind to form – for evolutionary thought morphology and history are truly the two dimensions of the same tree" (Moretti 2005: 69).

Moretti also borrows from Darwin the idea of natural selection. In literature, like in the biological world, only the strongest survive. Developing, which is to say evolving, through time, literary forms (genres, stylistic and narrative devices, figures, tropes, etc.) change and adapt to the environment, which in this case is no longer natural but cultural, and only those which most successfully adapt to environmental factors "survive". As adaptations are preserved, these variations lead to entirely new species. "For Darwin", Moretti continues, "'divergence of character' interacts throughout history with 'natural selection and extinction': as variations grow apart from each other, selection intervenes, allowing only a few to survive" (Moretti: 2005: 70-72). Moretti writes that this concept inspired him to explore "the analogous problem of literary survival"

(Moretti 2005: 72), i.e. the question of why only certain authors and works endure while the remainder, which is in fact the majority, is quickly consigned to library shelves as archive material.

Moretti explores these questions through the example of late 19th century British detective fiction, namely Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. The outcome of this research was first published in the above-mentioned "Slaughterhouse of Literature"; the version presented in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* is abridged and "updated " (Moretti 2005: 72). Starting from the assumption that the divergence of life forms or, in the case of literature, structural characteristics, can secure the survival of biological and literary forms, Moretti chose a trait characteristic of detective stories – clues – and traced the history of its transformations.[17] When the genre of detective fiction emerged in the last decades of the 19th century, only two variations existed: novels and stories with clues, and those without. In the short stories in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), Arthur Conan Doyle established the centrality of clues to the genre, although he was not the only author to use them. As Moretti's diagram shows, the authors apart from Doyle who used the device have today been forgotten, like McDonnell Bodkin, Catherine Pirkis, L. T. Meade, and Clifford Hallifax. The opposite column contains a list of writers Moretti calls "Doyle's rivals", who did not use clues. They soon disappeared due to market competition: "It is a good illustration of what the literary market is like: ruthless competition – hinging on form. Readers discover that they like a certain device, and if

[17] By "clues" Moretti means the introduction of devices that have the potential to shine a light on the mysteries or riddles in a story (by answering questions like who the murderer is), but that remain unnoticed by the reader, at least as far into the story as possible. The clues that could lead readers to solve the mystery are usually well disguised (mentioned only in passing or as speculation; intertwined with other devices; etc.).

a story doesn't seem to include it, they simply don't read it (and the story becomes extinct)" (Moretti 2005: 72).

But even if Moretti's reasoning stands, it does not explain what happened to those authors he lists who should have remained in the running, i.e. those who used clues but nevertheless failed to remain in the market. This explanation is furnished by the next "branching" of the evolutionary tree of detective fiction. In the next stage, Moretti writes, there is variation in approach (analogous with Darwin's "divergence of character" which leads to natural selection): alongside the novels and stories in which clues serve a function are novels in which the device serves no real function.

For example, a clue in the novel by Meade and Hallifax, *Race with the Sun*, reveals to the protagonist that his coffee is poisoned, but he drinks it anyway. The only explanation for this, Moretti writes, is that while the authors appreciated the importance of the device to detective novels, they used it without understanding how it worked. In other words, Meade and Hallifax did not fall from the 'tree of life' because they failed to use the device in question, but because they did not use it *well enough* (Moretti 2005: 72). Through his reasoning based on formal criteria, Moretti opens the way for a very different kind of criteria: qualitative criteria.

There is further variation in the following stage: now, clues can also be visible or not. Those that are "visible" can be "seen" and decoded by readers as the story unfolds; those that are "not visible" are the clues that are not "seen" in the story, but are mentioned by the detective as he explains how he solved the case. Moretti writes that at this "branching" point of the evolutionary tree, "we lose" all of Doyle's rivals because they do not use "visible" clues, and that the competition for evolutionary survival is lost not only by them but half of the stories in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* for the same reason. Finally, at the top of the tree

are the few evolutionary winners: those stories that contain all of the previous variations together with clues that readers, not just the detective, can decode. Generously speaking, of the twelve stories in Doyle's collection, there are four such stories in total; strictly speaking, not one. This is to say that Moretti's own analysis does not support his unequivocal explanation for Doyle's success: "Doyle owes his phenomenal success to his greater skill in the handling of clues; to his being the only one who made it to the top of the tree" (Moretti 2005: 74).

Moretti claims that in the final evolutionary branching (which necessitates decodable clues), "we lose" all but four of the stories in *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*, and concedes that even those stories survive only if a generous view is taken. In other words, while he makes no mistake in recognizing Doyle's skill, his analysis sooner points to the reverse. Moretti's analysis also reveals another oversight. It may be true that Doyle "survived" not because he *used* the device in question but because he did it far better than everyone else: his "phenomenal success" is attributed to his exceptional talent for telling detective stories with clues. But, Moretti's elaborate model of evolutionary trees notwithstanding, even if his analysis were to be modified such that it would provide valid support for the claim that the author and character of Sherlock Holmes top the evolutionary tree, this accurate and commonplace conclusion could still be reached by an intuitive reading of Doyle's works. Moretti's extensive research only reveals the inadequacy of his method.

Given that his approach to literary studies draws on everything from positivism to contemporary sociobiology, the inclusion of evolutionary ideas comes as no surprise. However, he uses these ideas mostly to construct superficial analogies and comparisons, and the citations he uses prevent

more profound correlations from being made between biological and cultural evolution. For example, since Darwin, it has generally been viewed that species survive in the biological world when new forms, evolved by continuous proliferation, are produced according to the principle of divergence, i.e. the differentiation and development of new characteristics. By contrast, cultures develop according to the principle of "convergence", i.e. the syncretizing and merging of species. In the words of renowned biologist Stephen Jay Gould: "evolution at the species level … is a story of continuous and irreversible proliferation" while cultural changes mostly depend on "amalgamation" and "anastomosis" (Moretti 2005: 78). Despite the disparity between biological and cultural evolution, Moretti would have it otherwise. While acknowledging that "convergence" is an important factor of cultural evolution, he claims that the principle of "divergence" cannot entirely be rejected. What is more, as established earlier, it is clear from his analysis of the evolution of free indirect style and the device of the clue in detective novels that he favors the principle of divergence when it comes to the production of new forms. Moretti writes: "Convergence … only arises *on the basis of previous divergence* … Divergence prepares the ground for convergence, which unleashes further divergence: this seems to be the typical pattern" (Moretti 2005: 80). This "cyclical matrix" of literary evolution can be illustrated by the history of genres: "convergence among separate lineages would be decisive in the genesis of genres", but once a genre stabilizes, "'interbreeding'" stops and "divergence" drives evolution (Moretti 2005: 80). Moretti's attempt to unite the principles of "convergence" and "divergence" in this way nevertheless fails to conceal the essential difference between cultural and biological evolution: cultural and literary evolution in particular cannot be understood without reference to cultural or literary values, for which there are no real analogies in biological evolution.

It is necessary here to point to another particularly characteristic failing of Moretti's literary evolutionism.[18] As is well known, Moretti borrowed the idea of natural selection from Darwin: in the literary world, like in the biological world, only the fittest survive. But according to Moretti, it is the market law of supply and demand that determines an author's success. This is probably one of Moretti's most glaringly problematic ideas:

> Readers: who read novel A (but not B, C, D, E, F, G, H…) and so keep A 'alive' into the next generation, when other readers may keep it alive into the following one, and so on until eventually A becomes canonized. Readers, not professors, make canons: academic decisions are mere echoes of a process that unfolds fundamentally outside the school: reluctant rubber-stamping, not much more. Conan Doyle is a perfect case in point: *socially* supercanonical right away, but *academically* canonical only a hundred years later. And the same happened to Cervantes, Defoe, Austen, Balzac, Tolstoy… (Moretti 2000b: 209)

Moretti's claim that the classic authors he cites were admitted to the canon a full century after they had gained popularity among the wider reading public, as was Doyle, is an oversimplification at best. The success of each of these writers is unique: Balzac's unlike Tolstoy's, Tolstoy's unlike Austen's, and cannot be explained by a single factor, especially not by the market. Multiple factors determine whether an author is admitted into the canon: the historically and culturally changing forms and views of literary

[18] For a more detailed critique of Moretti's evolutionism see Prendergast's "Negotiating World Literature". Also relevant is the afterword to *Graphs, Maps, Trees* by molecular biologist Alberto Piazza. Authors from different fields – statistics, philosophy, history, and literary theory – wrote responses to *Graphs, Maps, Trees* and to Moretti's conception of "new" literary history, collected in a single volume together with Moretti's response to those responses. See: Goodwin and Holbo (2011). They were largely receptive to Moretti's approach.

expression shaped by the Zeitgeist, including genre-specific criteria (19th century European poetry and novels had to meet different criteria for inclusion in the canon, for example); the literary career and fate of an author. By comparison, sales, or popularity among a broader reading public, is mostly of little importance, despite exceptions to the contrary (Dickens, Tolstoy's major works, Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, etc.) As it is, popularity is a relative concept (determined in relation to *particular* social groups or classes), and is rarely the deciding factor in the making of a classic or canonical author. The process of literary canonization is far more complex than the laws of the market economy would imply, and Moretti's understanding of it is yet another example of his sociological reductionism.

In Moretti's account of how the laws of supply and demand influence the process of literary canonization, he gives consideration only to the novel; other genres, most notably poetry, are conspicuously absent. He explains this by claiming that, "lyric poetry had already virtually lost its social function", so is no longer interesting from a sociological standpoint (Moretti 2000b: 209). Moretti then writes that because there are no real consequences for doing so, English professors can change the poetic canon entirely at their own whim and follow academic conventions that have nothing to do with how books are received in real life, by real readers, i.e. in the market: "A space outside the school, where the canon is selected: the market. Readers read A and so keep it alive; better, they *buy* A, inducing its publishers to keep it in print until another generation shows up, and so on" (Moretti 2000b: 209-210). In order to explain more precisely how this works, Moretti cites two economic theorists: Arthur De Vany and W. David Walls, who constructed a model of how the film industry generates popularity (and profit). According to their model, the film-going public plays the role of final arbiter in the film industry, which Moretti

considers directly applicable to how the canon of the 18th and 19th century novel was shaped. The public and the public only (critics are just one part of it) decides whether a film will become a hit or a flop. But as the rationale guiding the public seems irrational and disconnected from the meaning or value of the film, Moretti calls them "blind canon makers" (Moretti 2000b: 210): filmgoers concur with the assessment of those who have already seen it. If a film was successful when it opened, it is very likely that its popularity will increase with each new wave of viewers, which ultimately results in but a few films sharing the biggest pieces of the box-office pie. Moretti writes: "The centralization of the literary market is exactly the same as for films. After all, this is precisely how the canon is formed: very few books, occupying a very large space. This is what the canon is. As more readers select Conan Doyle over L. T. Meade and Grant Allen, more readers are likely to select Conan Doyle again in the future, until he ends up occupying 80, 90, 99.9 percent of the market for nineteenth-century detective fiction" (Moretti 2000b: 211).

To conclude: according to Moretti, a work becomes part of the literary canon because of its "popularity" – i.e. readership – and that popularity lasts for many generations of readers. Literature functions like any other branch of the entertainment industry. Moretti considers literary popularity analogous with Darwin's views on the survival of species, while simultaneously relating it to the economic law of supply and demand which rules the market. In such a grotesque patchwork of biology, sociology, and economics, barely informed by literary theory, the prospect of literary interests exerting an influence on literary canonization is thwarted from the start. But this is not a case where the clashing theoretical views have a roughly equal claim to undisputed facts.

Moretti's description of the process by which a literary canon comes into existence is entirely incorrect. A canon is not made by a "blind" reading public, but by a cultural elite, comprising not only literature professors but also literary critics and authors, as well as educated, discriminating readers. It is not so much formed by a writer's commercial fate as it is the outcome of a continual process of evaluation and explication. The market can explain the evolution of literature only if it is to be believed, like Moretti does, that the quantity of books sold is the sole criteria of canonical status and literary value. If that were true, Robert Ludlum would be a far more significant author than Proust, Joyce, or Mann, but Moretti abstains from explicitly formulating this conclusion however inevitable it appears to be when his understanding of the canon is examined. It could be said that it is clear even to him that literature is not everything that issues from the printing press, after all.

SOCIOLOGY OR LITERATURE?

THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET

Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (1999) also takes a sociologically informed view of comparative literature. Inspired, like Moretti, by a world-systems approach that draws on history, economics, and sociology, Casanova attempts to establish the premise that literature functions as a sociological institution.[1] By studying the role of literature in various social contexts over an extended period of time, she aims to write a history of the "world literary space". In the introductory chapter, titled after Henry James' famous story "The Figure in the Carpet", Casanova gives a rather unconventional explanation of her historical approach, which draws on an interpretation of James' story and metaphors derived from its title. But seeing as her interpretation has no foundation in James' text, the unorthodox style of this explication yields unsatisfactory results. In order to substantiate this claim, Casanova's interpretation will be briefly summarized, following a recapitulation of James' story, set out below.

[1] See above, p. 128, and Moretti, pp. 117. Casanova was influenced by Braudel's ideas of the world as a unified system, as well as by Bourdieu's theory of the sociological fields of cultural production and account of symbolic capital.

In "The Figure in the Carpet", James examines one of his favorite topics: the relationship between artist and public; or, more generally speaking, the problem of interpreting art. It is sometimes referred to as a parable about reading and is classified by Leon Edel in the group of James' stories that he terms "fables for critics" (Edel 1964: I, 15). An unnamed protagonist, who is the first person narrator of this story and a young and inexperienced literary critic, is beseeched by an older and more talented fellow critic, George Corvick, to review the novel of a famous author, Hugh Vereker. After the review is written and published, the young critic encounters the author at a dinner party, where he learns that he has missed the point. The conversation that ensues is of key importance to the development of the plot and understanding of the story. Vereker, attempting to set the protagonist's interpretation of his novel straight, says that no critic has succeeded in discovering the idea behind the novel, which is central not only to the novel in question but to all of his work. The narrator learns that the author's "general intention" is not an aspect of form or content; rather, *everything* – "the order, the form, the texture" of Vereker's books – points to it (James 1986: 366). It is like a "buried treasure", a "complex figure in a Persian carpet" (James 1986: 369, 374), stretching through Vereker's opus. Vereker refuses to say what it is exactly, suggesting that anyone who looks for it carefully enough should be able to find it, because it is "as concrete there as a bird in a cage, a bait on a hook, a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap". This prompts the narrator to barrage Vereker with a series of questions, in an attempt to guess at what it might be (James 1986: 368). James phrases these questions to sound like those of a stereotypical critic: inquiring whether the secret is "a kind of esoteric message", "something in the style or something in the thought? An element of form or an element of feeling", "some idea *about* life, some sort of philosophy" (James 1986: 367-8). All of these questions, of course, remain unanswered.

Later in the story, the protagonist becomes so preoccupied with the secret he believes to be hidden in Vereker's works that in his obsessive quest he seeks the help of his friend Corvick, who in turn shares the puzzle with his fiancée Gwendolen, a writer. They, too, set out to discover the "buried treasure" in Vereker's works. While on a trip to India, Corvick sends Gwendolen a telegram informing her that he finally understands what lies behind Vereker's works. All of the elements of Vereker's "figure" had suddenly come together in a serendipitous flash of inspiration, and the larger meaning of his works became perfectly clear. Shortly thereafter, Corvick sends another telegram from Italy where he had gone to meet Vereker, who confirmed that he had found the secret. However, Corvick dies before he is able to disclose his discovery to the protagonist, who has no other recourse but to visit Gwendolen and hope to learn something from her. But his hopes are dashed when Gwendolen dies, and as Vereker and his wife had also died, the protagonist, distressed that he might never discover the secret that haunts him, approaches Gwendolen's second husband, Drayton Deane, who is also a critic. He confides in him his obsession, recounting his quest to solve the mystery, but to no avail, as Deane had not known of the secret.

James' parable about reading contrasts two types of readers, two types of interpretations of literary texts. The first type of reader is represented by the young critic, the narrator of the story, who is the main but not the only target of James' irony. The narrator arrives at his interpretations not by immersing himself in the text and pursuing the author's literary allusions, but through preconceived notions and stereotypical assumptions, which are evidenced by the types of questions he asks Vereker during their conversation at the beginning of the story. James suggests that such an endeavor is destined to fail from the start, because to read in that way is to seek meaning where it could not

possibly be: outside of the text. First, the young critic tries to find the secret of Vereker's works by talking to him; next, he hopes his friend Corvick will uncover it for him; then, he approaches Corvick's widow, prepared to marry her if this would mean finding the solution to the mystery that has plagued him. James' irony is evident. Though James' unfortunate protagonist is a critic by profession and thus supposedly adept at evaluating literary works, he lacks even an elementary grasp of his trade: it seems to have escaped him that the meaning of a literary work should be sought exclusively within that literary work. James juxtaposes this kind of 'reading' with the approach advocated by the fictional author, Vereker. This type of reading enables Corvick, in a flash of inspiration, to recognize the "figure" in Vereker's works: immersion in a work and trust in the author permits the discovery of the "figure" that eludes wrong-minded critics.

Casanova is justified in her assertion that "The Figure in the Carpet" represents the "criticizing [of] the critic and his usual assumptions". Also well-founded is her assessment that this story, "invites a rethinking of the whole question of critical perspective and of the aesthetic foundations on which it rests" (Casanova 2004: 2). Those observations notwithstanding, viewed as a whole, Casanova's interpretation of James' story is invalid because it has no foundation in the text itself. Casanova writes that in the young critic's bid to discover the secret of Vereker's works, "it never occurs to" him "to question the nature of the questions that he puts to texts". What is more, he does not try to challenge his assumptions that bar him from recognizing the "figure" he is seeking, and which, according to Casanova, stem from a conviction that a literary work represents an "absolute exception", which is to say an "unpredictable, and isolated expression of artistic creativity". This presupposition is faulty, Casanova writes, because no critic ever questions it:

"In this sense, the literary critic practices a radical monadology (*monadisme radicale*)". To her, a literary work is like a Leibnizian monad, "unique and irreducible, a perfect unity that can be measured in relation only to itself, [such that] the interpreter is obliged to contemplate the ensemble of texts that form what is called the 'history of literature' as a random succession of singularities". As she fails to specify what kind of criticism suffers from "radical monadology", it may be concluded that, in her opinion, this preconception is characteristic of literary criticism in general. What this means for James' exasperated critic is that he could have solved the mystery if only he had viewed Vereker's work not as a solitary monad, but within the historical "ensemble of [other] texts" (Casanova 2004: 2). The problem with this reading, however, is that it has no basis in the text: James does not ridicule his protagonist because he sees Vereker's works as isolated units, but because he does not read them attentively enough.

But that is not what Casanova sets out to suggest by interpreting James' story as a call for the relevance of literary history. Instead, the purpose of her chapter is to argue that a "total" historical perspective should be substituted for a monadic and particularist view of literary criticism that sees a work as an isolated entity. Accordingly, individual works are to be viewed in terms of other works and the larger social-historical context. Casanova's history of literature has a very broad focus: on the one hand, it is a history of *world* literature, and on the other, a history of literary life in general. A work can only be understood in the context of "all the literary texts through and against which it has been constructed":

> A literary work can be deciphered only on the basis of the whole of the composition, for its rediscovered coherence stands revealed only in relation to the entire literary

> universe of which it is a part. The singularity of individual literary works therefore becomes manifest only against the background of the overall structure in which they take their place. Each work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense 'combination' constituted by the literary world as a whole. (Casanova 2004: 3)

Casanova's anomalous interpretation of James' metaphor of the figure in the carpet in the excerpt above demonstrates that she is as far from the meaning of James' story as James' young critic is from that of Vereker's works. The only valid comparison that can be made between Casanova's literary-historical methods and the "message" of James' parable is the resemblance between Casanova herself and James' incompetent critic. Casanova's 'reading' in *The World Republic of Letters* is the kind of reading that subscribes to critical stereotypes, which is the target of James' irony. By claiming that the critic-protagonist of James' story fails to recognize the "figure" of Vereker's works because he espouses "radical monadism", Casanova is being unfaithful to James' text. But rather than stopping there, she goes a step further by interpreting the "figure in the carpet" in the spirit of the "total" history of literature. Such an analysis is hardly warranted because although Vereker does say in a conversation with the young critic that the same point that can be found in the one novel runs through all of his novels, he is speaking only of *his* works, not of books by other authors, and certainly not about world literature in general. As it happens, James' understanding of literature is more closely aligned with the spirit of the type of criticism that Casanova is challenging: formalist criticism based on textual analysis. Her approach to James' story also symptomizes the main flaw in the direction of her thought. Casanova's literary history is faulty because it is not rooted in the close reading of literary works, which presupposes faith in the writer. The absence of close analysis

– which is less the absence of *analysis* than it is the absence of contact of any kind with the text – undermines the validity of the approach Casanova seeks to advance. What is the point of literary history if it gives the wrong impression of the history of literature?

HISTORY OR LITERATURE?

In the conclusion to *The World Republic of Letters*, entitled "The World and the Literary Trousers",[2] Casanova digresses slightly from the topic of the previous chapter, though without making any completely new assertions, and critiques one of Roland Barthes famous works, "History or Literature?" The work was published over half a century ago, in Barthes' book *On Racine*.[3] Given Casanova's proclivity towards historical approaches to literature, it is not hard to understand why she would cite this already classic text, even though it is a particularly sharp invective against literary history. But, like her interpretation of James' story, Casanova's reading of Barthes' polemic also misses the mark: not only does she fail to refute Barthes' arguments but the support she cites proves Barthes right.

Barthes thinks it is impossible for the history of literature to be the history of *literature* because literature, by its

[2] The phrase stems from Beckett's book on art criticism, devoted to the works of Bram and Geer von Velde, published as, *The Painting of the Van Veldes*, or *the World and the Trousers* (*Peinture des Van Velde ou Le Monde et le pantalon*), in the journal *Les Cahiers d'Art*, 1945-1946. The reference to *the world and trousers* is an allusion to a joke that Beckett tells in *Endgame* (1957): "Customer: God made the world in six days, and you, you couldn't be bothered to make me a pair of trousers in six months? Tailor: But Sir, look at the world and look at your trousers."

[3] "Histoire ou littérature?" in the book *Sur Racine*, 1963. The work was first published in *Annals* (*Annales*, 1960, vol. 15, br. 3, 524-537), under the title "History and Literature: Concerning Racine" ("Histoire et littérature: à propos de Racine").

nature, is ahistorical. "Literature's very being", Barthes writes, lies outside history, which is why it cannot be accessed through historical research: "Literature's very being, when restored to history, is no longer a being". The nature of literature is seen differently by the literary historian than by the literary critic: "Secularized, but to my mind all the richer, literature [in the history of literature] becomes one of those great human activities, of relative form and function". The form and function of literature changes with time and the task of literary history is to study those outer changes to the timeless "being" of literature. Thus, literary history deals only with the external circumstances surrounding literary works: the history of literature is, "possible only at the level of literary *functions* (production, communication, consumption), and not at the level of the individuals who manage these functions. In other words, a history of literature is possible only as a sociological discipline which is concerned with activities and institutions, and not with individuals" (Barthes 1960: 530). It is necessary to clarify at this juncture that, for Barthes, a legitimate approach to the history of literature does not entail research into an author's life or character, but research into the works or the psychology of an author (such as Racine) manifest in those works.

Unlike literary criticism, literary history can reveal *what* literature *is* and, by extension, what literature *was* in a given historical period. It can tell us, "what literature was … for Racine and his contemporaries, precisely what function was entrusted to it, what place in the hierarchy of values". In Barthes' opinion, the history of literature is nothing but "the history of the very idea of literature" (Barthes 1960: 529). Such a view of the subject and approach to the history of literature has a deep theoretical background rooted in the separation of literary history from literary criticism. While Barthes takes this stand in this earlier work, it was most coherently formulated in his better-known work published a

few years later, *Criticism and Truth* (*Critique et vérité*, 1966). Barthes rejects the approach taken in traditional literary theory, according to which literary criticism and literary history are understood to be distinct but complementary disciplines: supplementing each other in their different lines of research dealing with specific works of literature. He claims that literary criticism and literary history are two entirely different disciplines, with different subjects of study, methods, and objectives. "In short," he writes, "in literature, there are two postulates: one is historical, insofar as literature is an institution; the other psychological, insofar as it is creation. Two disciplines are thus required to study it, differing both in object and method; in the first case, the object is literary institution, the method is historical method … In the second case, the object is literary creation; the method is psychological investigation." Barthes claims that these disciplines also differ in terms of their "criteria of objectivity". As literary history deals with verifiable facts, it can be conceived of as an objective scientific discipline; by contrast, literary criticism involves subjective value judgments and changing critical paradigms, so its conclusions are speculative: "the entire misfortune of our literary histories is to have confused them, constantly encumbering literary creation with petty facts of history, and combining the most demanding historical scruple with postulates that are by definition highly contestable." (Barthes 1960: 526) On the basis of such presuppositions, Barthes concludes: "If one wants to write literary history, one must renounce the individual Racine and deliberately undertake the study of techniques, rules, rites and collective mentalities; and if one wants to install oneself inside Racine, with whatever qualification – if one wants to speak, even if only a word, about the Racinian *self* – one must expect to see the humblest scholarship suddenly become systematic, and the most prudent critic reveal himself as an utterly subjective, utterly historical being." (Barthes 1960: 537)

Casanova takes issue with Barthes for equating literary history with sociology and thereby causing its "excommunication" from literature. She writes that in his work, the history of literature, "stands accused of being incapable of rising high enough in the heaven of the pure forms of literary art" (Casanova 2004: 349). She considers that the history of literature should be reconceived as a unique *literary* discipline: not as a history of particular national literatures, but as a history of world literature. Such an approach to the history of literature, Casanova writes, would be a synthesis of "internal" and "external" approaches; in other words, it would involve the close reading of a literary work and consider the work's social and political functions. On the face of it, there appears to be no reason to challenge this postulate; as the book unfolds, however, it is a different story. Most conspicuously, there is no trace of a synthetic approach of this kind in *The World Republic of Letters*. Neither a "formalist" nor any other kind of analysis of literary works is given a walk-on role: the book's only protagonist is an "external" or, more accurately, a sociological approach to literary works. If it is true that Barthes adversely affected the history of literature because his ideas led to its "excommunication" from literature, it must not be far from the truth that Casanova caused literature itself to be expelled from the world republic of letters. This is the most common criticism of Casanova's book. Prendergast, taking issue on this point, writes that a major shortcoming of Casanova's history of world literature is that it teaches nothing of literature: "What we are given are historically situated perceptions of authors, traditions and texts (those produced by literary histories, polemical essays, publicity machines) but no sense of what makes a literary text a text". The study of perceptions is a perfectly legitimate focus for the history of literature, Prendergast continues, so long as this includes careful consideration of the literary texts in which

they are manifested. This does not mean that the method of "close reading" should be substituted for literary history, but "the lack of any literary-analytical perspective … does have major adverse knock-on effects for the validity of Casanova's more general arguments" (Prendergast 2004b: 22-23). Thomas Austenfeld similarly claims that Casanova, "may appear tone-deaf to [the] literary or aesthetic implications" of a literary work, which is to say that in her book there "is an almost complete absence of aesthetic interpretation" (Austenfeld 2006: 142-143). In the work "Literature as a World", Casanova responds to such criticism by claiming that her goal in *The World Republic of Letters* was not to "analys[e] literature on a world scale" but to formulate "conceptual means for thinking literature *as* a world" (Casanova 2005: 73). But this response does not entirely absolve her of the criticism leveled against her by Prendergast and Austenfeld. In literary scholarship, if analysis and synthesis are not text-based, theory cannot be substantiated by facts, and veracity is undermined.

Casanova's response is also unusual in light of a claim that she herself makes in *The World Republic of Letters*. Namely, she declares at one point that "literariness" in works of world literature is central to her work. She employs the term "literariness" in a sense very different from that in which Jakobson uses it, despite the fact that she cites him.[4] While for Jakobson "literariness" is that which makes a given work literary, Casanova thinks that it should also denote similar features of language as a socio-political phenomenon: "literariness", she writes, is "that by virtue of which a language or a text is literary" (Casanova 2004: 359, n20). In other words, "literariness" is the measure of "linguistic and literary capital": "Certain languages, by virtue of the prestige of the texts written in them, are reputed to be more literary than others,

[4] She writes that she uses the term in a sense that is "*very close* to that of Roman Jakobson" (emphasis added, Casanova 2004: 359, n20).

to embody literature" (Casanova 2004: 17). However, for the most part, Casanova only uses this meaning of the term in the first part of her book. In the rest of *The World Republic of Letters*, the term is used as a synonym for the *autonomy* of literature: in Casanova's view, literature that possesses "literariness" is emancipated from extra-literary – especially political and ideological – functions. "Literariness" is ascribed to those works that revolve around questions of literary form, technique, and style. But "literariness", understood as such, only has a walk-on role in Casanova's book. As has already been stated, Casanova does not examine the literary aspects of literature; writers and their works are considered only in terms of the geopolitical history of Europe and the world or, occasionally, the socio-political life of the nation that produced them. Accordingly, Casanova's approach, contrary to her stand on the matter, bears out Barthes' claim that the history of literature is possible only as a sociological discipline.

Barthes' conviction regarding the impossibility of literary history as the history of *literature* has serious implications for all approaches to literary history. But in the work cited, Barthes devotes special attention to a particular method of literary history: Lucien Febvre's "historical program", which was a significant departure from traditional positivist literary history. Febvre, who was one of the founders of The Annales School of historiography, proposed a program that effected a "radical conversion" of traditional literary history (Barthes 1960: 526), and according to which writers were not viewed as individuals, but "participants in an institutional activity that transcends them individually" (Barthes 1960: 529). Febvre sees literature as a social institution and asks that historians study it as such by pointing to its social, economic, and political functions. Although this conception of "institutional" literary history has little to do with literature in the exact sense of the word, for Barthes it is the only conceivable type of literary history: "To amputate literature from the

individual! The uprooting is evident, even the paradox. But a history of literature is possible only at this price" (Barthes 1960: 529). Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* illustrates this thesis of Barthes' more convincingly than does Febvre's program. It takes as its main subject the study of "literary life", not specific literary works. Although Casanova makes no mention of either Febvre or Barthes' evaluation of Febvre's program in her summary of "History or Literature?", her own approach is clearly indebted to the idea of "total history" as defined by the Annales School.[5] She does acknowledge the influence Febvre's close associate Braudel has on her thought, and emphasizes Braudel's insistence that social and economic phenomena, including literature, be studied in the broadest possible, i.e. worldwide, terms. Casanova imagines the "world republic of letters" to be a "worldwide reality" (Casanova 2004: 5): as a "literature-world" ("littérature-monde")[6] or "homogenous and autonomous sphere" (Casanova 2004: 117) which is structurally analogous to the world political-economic sphere, but relatively independent of it (Casanova 2004: 10-11).

As mentioned earlier, Braudel's global theoretical framework for understanding political and economic history inspired Wallerstein's "world-systems" theory, which directly influenced Moretti's "new comparative literature".[7] Moretti took from Wallerstein the idea of the world system as "one but unequal", and used it as the basis of his theory of

[5] Along with Henri Hauser and Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre belongs to the first generation of the Annales historians. The second generation includes Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, Georges Duby, etc. Barthes opens "History or Literature?", in which he makes the case for Febvre, with a description of a radio program that demonstrated, "the disorder of aesthetic productions, the vanity of a *total history*" (emphasis added, Barthes 1960: 524).

[6] Casanova explains that she formulated this term as a transposition of Braudel's term, *économie-monde*.

[7] See: Prendergast 2004b: 4-5 and Austenfeld 2006: 141. See above, p. 128.

world literature, according to which national literatures are located in the center, semi-periphery, or periphery of the world literary space. Casanova also makes a distinction between the center and periphery in her world republic of letters, which is why it is strange that she makes no mention of either Wallerstein or Moretti, even though their ideas – particularly Moretti's concept of "three Europes" forwarded in *Atlas of the European Novel* – must have been familiar to her at the time she was writing her book.[8] Those influential social historical theorists that are mentioned in *The World Republic of Letters*, such as Braudel and Pierre Bourdieu, serve more of an ideological than a academic purpose. Casanova does not systematically apply the theories that inform her approach to the history of world literature in the same way that Moretti fails to apply the theories that inform his own work, when, for example, he traces the evolution of the device of the clue in Doyle's detective stories. Because Casanova uses terms borrowed from Braudel's political and economic history without defining their original meaning, or the meaning she ascribes to them in transposing them into a literary-historical context, the reader is left with the impression that she employs them more or less arbitrarily, in an imprecise fashion.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OR GLOBALIZATION?

Even where she uses her own terminology, Casanova compromises scholarly rigor. The very title of her work, *La République mondiale des letters*, raises a series of questions which are never completely answered. The most confusing titular term is *lettres*. As it is semantically more

[8] But, when she writes of the different values of the literary "capital" of different nations, Casanova – as Prendergast noted – nonetheless cites Braudel's notion of "unequal structures", i.e., the unequal distribution of economic and social resources among different nations (Casanova 2004: 82). See: Prendergast 2004b: 6.

salient than the commonplace term *littérature*, the question arises as to whether it is being used to further an agenda. But this soon proves not to be the case, because Casanova rarely uses the term as the book progresses, instead employing the far more common term *littérature*. What is more, the term *lettres*, in accordance with the etymological meaning of the English word *letter*, or the Serbian words *slovo* or *slovesnost* and the Russian *словéсность*, denotes not just the imaginative forms of literature, but all that has ever been written, and is thus vastly heterogeneous: including poetry, drama, and novels, as well as books on philosophy, the natural sciences, law, philology, history, and journalism. However, in her book, Casanova deals *exclusively* with the imaginative forms of literature, which is to say *belles-lettres*, so that it remains unclear what the word *lettres* in the title of her book has to do with her understanding of the world literary republic. All of this becomes even more puzzling if we consider that the discrepancy between the two words and their respective semantic histories would give weight to one of her central arguments: namely, the gradual emancipation of literature with artistic merit (*littérature*) from other forms of writing that have a predominantly extra-artistic or practical purpose (*lettres*).

Prendergast sees the title of Casanova's book as an empty allusion to the intellectual "literary republic" of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.[9] This literary republic was comprised of European and American scholars from multiple disciplines in the arts and sciences who advanced and disseminated their knowledge through epistolary exchange, in the same way that scholars do today via the new communication channels brought by advances in technology. But Prendergast criticizes, on several counts, the comparison Casanova draws between the world republic of letters,

[9] Prendergast 2004b: 11. On the concept of "res publica litterarum" see Buescu 2011: 126-136.

the Goethean community of national literatures, and the literary republic of the enlightenment period. First, because the enlightened members of the literary republic were mostly philosophers and scientists, not writers and poets; second, they did not see themselves as representatives of particular national traditions but as individuals who, by corresponding with other individuals, were participating in an intellectual life free of national characteristics. Finally, Prendergast writes, the members of this pre-Goethean literary republic communicated with each other by way of *private* letters, which means that their exchange of knowledge was a far remove from the idea of the international literary "market" that gained currency with Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*, and that forms the basis of Casanova's understanding of world literature (Prendergast 2004b: 23).

The only words in Casanova's title that Prendergast thinks carry any semantic weight are the adjective *mondiale*, from the phrase *littérature mondiale* (world literature), and the noun derived from it, *mondialisation*. Although the English noun *globalization* is commonly translated into French as *mondialisation*, the term *globalisation* is becoming standard usage in French, too. Prendergast writes that the two French terms *mondialisation* and *globalisation* can generally be taken as synonyms. However, he continues, there has been an attempt to create a semantic distinction between them: philosopher Étienne Tassin has proposed that *globalisation* refer to the export of the neoliberal concept of the market economy to all corners of the world, and *mondialisation*, the idea of a unified world that is being threatened by the destructive forces of that very market economy.[10] But there is no justification for the relevance of such a distinction to Casanova's book; nowhere does she contrast the terms *mondialisation* and *globalisation*;

[10] Here, Prendergast cites one of Tassin's untranslatable play on words: "Loin d'être une mondialisation, la globalisation est, littéralement, 'immonde'." (Prendergast 2004b: 23)

on the contrary, she uses them as synonyms.[11] On the other hand, it is hard to shake the impression that the semantic distinction that Prendergast calls attention to would be of use to her at least in some sections of the book, for example, in the chapter "From Internationalism to Globalization", in which, aside from differentiating between national and world ("international") literature, she introduces distinctions between artistic "avant-garde" or "independent" literature and commercial literature. Casanova claims that at the end of the 20th century, the structure of the world literary space was more complex than it had been only a few decades earlier. Today, not even the "oldest", most autonomous national literatures dominate the world literary space due to the "appearance and consolidation" of commercial literature – the commercial novel in particular. (Casanova 2004: 169). Of course, commercial literature had existed previously, but its success had been limited to within the confines of the national literary market: authors of national bestsellers did not gain literary fame in international literary spaces; this was reserved for a nation's most valuable and, in Goethe's words, most representative literary works. The rise of the international bestseller came about for two reasons, according to Casanova: the increasingly profit-oriented business model of the publishing industry, and globalization, which is to say the imposition of the American model of popular culture on the rest of the world: "America's economic dominance, notably in the fields of cinema and literature, has created a global market for its popular national novels (of which *Gone With the Wind* is perhaps the classic example) on the basis of worldwide familiarity with

[11] For example: "The internationalization that I propose to describe here therefore signifies more or less the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by the neutralizing term 'globalization'"; cf. the terminological distinctions in the French original (Casanova 2004:40): "Ce modèle d'une République internationale des Lettres s'oppose donc à la représentation pacifiée du monde, partout désignée sous le nom de mondialisation (ou *globalization*)" (Casanova 2008: 31).

Hollywood culture." (Casanova 2004: 170) The publishing logic of liberal capitalism not only dictates the core principle of the publishing business – to make the most profit in the shortest amount of time – but essentially changes the very nature of literature – or at least, the most significant literary genre, the novel, as well as the criteria of literary evaluation. In the latter half of the 20th century, a new type of novel was manufactured that catered to the demands of the international mass market: "world fiction", as it was called, adhered to a tried-and-tested commercial formula. Casanova describes this "global novel": "new in its form and its effects, that circulates easily and rapidly through virtually simultaneous translations and whose extraordinary success is due to the fact that its denationalized content can be absorbed without any risk of misunderstanding". But this kind of novel, Casanova concludes, leads us out of the domain of literary "internationalism" and into the realm of the liberal market economy (Casanova 2004: 172).

The "global novel" that Casanova writes about is in fact an example of denationalized "planetary" literature, which, as we saw earlier, is advocated by American "new comparatists" Spivak and Apter. Nevertheless, Casanova's "world republic of letters" is preferable to "planetary" literature, because it does not undermine the notion of national literature but, to the contrary, implies that the world republic of letters is founded on the principle of variety among different literatures, preserving their national identities entirely or at least substantially. Casanova rightly states that globalization leads to the "denationalization" of particular literatures, i.e. the substitution of a single universal ("global") cultural model for unique national traditions. Unlike American "new comparatists", Casanova does not see the evolution of world literature as a process of "hybridization" or "creolization", i.e. erasure of difference and elimination of diversity, but, to the contrary, as an ongoing battle between different languages, traditions, cultural models, schools,

movements, and styles (Casanova 2004: 11-12). The fundamental principle of world literature is not globalization – or, in Auerbach's words, standardization – but its opposite, internationalization: "The internationalization that I propose to describe here therefore signifies more or less the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by the neutralizing term 'globalization,' which suggests that the world political and economic system can be conceived as the generalization of a single and universally applicable model." (Casanova 2004: 40) Casanova could have explained more precisely what she means by "internationalization" and further clarified her conception of a world literature that departs from it had she observed the semantic distinction that Tassin has elucidated between the French term *mondialisation* and the English term *globalisation*.

Casanova posits that "the world republic of letters" emerged in 16th century France, concurrent with the formation and development of the first great nation states of Western Europe. Since then, "international literary space" has continued to spread:

> Previously confined to regional areas that were sealed off from each other, literature now emerged as a common battleground. Renaissance Italy, fortified by its Latin heritage, was the first recognized literary power. Next came France, with the rise of the Pléiade in the mid-sixteenth century, which in challenging both the hegemony of Latin and the advance of Italian produced a first tentative sketch of transnational literary space. Then Spain and England, followed by the rest of the countries of Europe, gradually entered into competition on the strength of their own literary 'assets' and traditions. The nationalist movements that appeared in central Europe during the nineteenth century – a century that also saw the arrival of North America and Latin America on the international literary scene – generated new claims to literary existence. Finally, with decolonization, countries in Africa,

> the Indian subcontinent, and Asia demanded access to literary legitimacy and existence as well. (Casanova 2004: 11)

"The world republic of letters" has its own laws and currency, its own market in which literary values are traded, and, most importantly, its own history. In Casanova's view, this history has, until now, been insufficiently researched mainly because the evolution of literature was traditionally viewed as an extension of a nation's political history. Her work, by contrast, largely centers on the hypothesis of the autonomous development of "the world republic of letters". This republic was not immediately autonomous, however; literary independence is reached gradually, through an evolutionary process that has "literariness" as its ultimate goal. Casanova distinguishes three stages in the evolution of world literature. The first stage dates from the second half of the 16th to the end of the 18th century and saw the appearance of literature in the vernacular, which is why Casanova calls it the age of "revolutionary vernacularizing", after a phrase taken from Benedict Anderson. The second stage covers the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries and brought a "lexicographic" or "philological revolution", which she also describes in Anderson's terms. It was a period when "new nationalist movements" and "new" national literatures emerged throughout Europe. Finally, the third stage, the "process of decolonization", began after the First World War and was marked by the entry into literary competition of nations which had previously been "prevented from taking part" (Casanova 2004: 47-48).

In the first stage, the age of "revolutionary vernacularizing", a new literature written in the vulgar tongue emerged in Europe that rivaled classical Greek and Latin literature. Casanova claims that in the mid-16th century, the basis of "the world republic of letters" was laid in *La deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse* (*The Defense and Illustration of*

the French Language 1549) by Joachim du Bellay. This book, which du Bellay wrote with the assistance of Ronsard in imitation of Horace's advice to poets so popular during the Renaissance, defends the French vernacular as the language of poetry and literature. It is an attack on those writers and humanists who wrote their poetic and philosophical works in Latin and Greek, who viewed their language as "barbarous", unsuitable for lofty thought. If French was currently impoverished, this was not due to any intrinsic shortcomings, but due to the fact that it had not been cultivated as diligently as the classical languages had been; with pruning and grafting, it would grow and soon reach a greatness equivalent to that of Greek and Latin. Du Bellay provides poets with a series of guidelines for enriching the French vernacular. To write their own original works in French, they should appropriate words from Greek and Latin, employ archaic and provincial French words, coin new words, and employ the technical terms used in various trades and crafts, as classical writers had done before them. Because the second part of the book, which served as the manifesto of the noteworthy 16th century group of poets known as la Pléiade, focuses more on questions of modes of writing (poetic genres, versification, the history of both French poetry and the Pléiade's greatest rivals: Italian and Spanish poets) than questions of a linguistic nature, du Bellay in the last chapter of his *Deffence* returns to the question of language and continues to encourage French writers to write in "the native French language". Here, however, he exhorts them for the sake of patriotism: neither the Greeks nor the Romans would have been as great as they were had they slavishly imitated other languages; if the French aspire to greatness, they must therefore cultivate and enrich their native tongue.

Casanova writes that du Bellay's insistence on the suitability of French as a poetic language was "a paradigmatic initiative", supplying a model for French but also world literature. She claims that this was the first time that a national literature

(French) openly stood in diametrical opposition to other national literatures (ancient Greek and Latin), and the first time that national language was established as a legitimate literary language, used for literary expression (Casanova 2004: 46). For this claim to be even moderately tenable, it ought to specify that this type of "world literary space" was constituted for the first time in *recent* European history, because a similar corelation between language and literature existed in antiquity, in ancient Greek and Roman literature. What is more, a unique literary space had been formed on the other side of Europe long before du Bellay and la Pléiade, in the literatures belonging to the realm of Byzantine culture. Casanova completely disregards this literature, which also drew inspiration from ancient Greek models and thus can also be considered part of European literature.

Casanova writes that by heralding the dawn of international competition between different languages and literatures, du Bellay "laid the foundations of a unified international literary space" built on the rivalry between specific national traditions and a diversion of assets. As a result, he made it possible for national literatures to gradually become "unified" in a "world republic of letters", erected on international, not global, foundations (Casanova 2004: 54). But according to Casanova, another condition had to be met for the "literary republic" to be formed: the national and political legitimization of the French language. This meant that du Bellay's defensive project, and by extension the literary manifesto of the Pléiade, needed the support of the state and king, which, through a fortunate series of events, it got: in the late 16th and throughout the 17th century, the creation of a new literature and the standardization of the language, specifically its Parisian dialect,[12] and the

[12] This dialect was spoken in the region of the Île-de-France, the capital of which was Paris. As it was spoken at court, it was called the "king's language" ("langue du roi") and became the language of French literature (Casanova 2004: 51).

formation of the state and its most important institutions developed on parallel tracks.[13] Casanova supports her thesis that the formation of national literature requires legitimization by a centralized state by citing arguments drawing on the case of Italy, beginning in the early 14th century with Dante's unfinished tract *De vulgari eloquentia* and continuing through the mid-16th century.[14] Although the Italian, which is to say Tuscan, literature of that period by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio produced the greatest number of classic works in Italian as well as European literature, the attempts to produce a vernacular literature did not lead to the legitimization of national Italian literature or the formation of a "world republic of letters" due to the absence of a centralized state structure (Casanova 2004: 56). Only in 16th century France did the French language and the literature written in it become subject to codification, culminating in "classicism". Classicism prescribed the intricate rules of grammar and rhetoric and proper usage of the French language, the ultimate goal of which was not only its "literariness", i.e. the transformation of French from a vernacular to a literary language, but the creation of a literature that would become the "symbolic capital" of the greatest nation state in Europe at that time, the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV (Casanova 2004: 64).

[13] Ten years prior to du Bellay's *Defense*, 1539, François I stipulated in an ordinance that legal rulings were to be written in French ("the language of the king"), rather than Latin. What is more, in 1530, François I founded the Collège des Lecteurs Royaux, now the Collège de France, ordering the construction of libraries and the translation of classical works into French after the example of the Italian humanists. Finally, a French *Bible* was read and increasingly disseminated in classes held at church schools and universities (Casanova 2004: 50-52).

[14] One of the central issues in the poetic debate led in 16th century Italy was the question of whether the vernacular should be used in literature. The debate culminated in a work by Pietro Bembo, *Prose della vulgar lingua* (1525), which advocated a return to the literary and linguistic (Tuscan) tradition of the 14th century (Casanova 2004: 56).

Casanova views the earlier development of French literature as a process of gradual emancipation from Latin and classical models as well as the influence of the church, on the one hand, and the process of legitimization through the forging of ties with the state and its national politics, on the other. But as the evolution of literature in its ultimate pursuit of "literariness" and literary autonomy is a lengthy process, it continued through the 18th century; only then was literature freed from the influence of the king and state. Because writers had broken away from domination by the church, "it remained for [them] … to free themselves first from dependency on the king, and then from subjection to the national cause" (Casanova 2004: 69). According to Casanova, the development of French literature in the 18th and 19th centuries is evidence of emancipation of this kind. At the same time, important changes were taking place on the international level that significantly expanded the territory of the "world republic of letters". From the end of the 18th century, French literature was rivaled first by English literature and then, in the early decades of the 19th century, by other European literatures, German literature first among them. These literatures, emerging out of the Romantic movement, challenged French classicism's exclusive claim to the concept of the beautiful in literature and, largely as a result of the "Herder effect", championed the use of native languages and folklore in literature. Inspired by Herder's ideas, the literatures of "little" nations (Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Serbian, Croatian, etc.) entered the world literary space as well (Casanova 2004: 77-78).

Two things stand out from Casanova's account of world literature. First, unlike world literature as it is conceived in "new comparative literature", which comprehends various parts of the world within the global connectedness of contemporary literature, Casanova's "world republic of letters" is not made up of only contemporary works, but also those from the past, produced by different national literatures and

written in different languages, which through the centuries have become part of the universal "transnational" heritage. This arguably historical dimension to Casanova's thesis is comparable to a traditional understanding of comparative literature, akin to Auerbach's conception of world literature or Curtius' idea of European literature. That said, the similarities end there as she does not take into account classical Greek or classical and medieval Latin literature, which in Curtius' opinion forms the bridge between classical and modern literature. This aspect of "the world republic of letters" will be examined in more detail later. Second, unlike Spivak and Apter, who speak of world literature as an international literary system, Casanova does not question the validity of national literature. On the contrary, the idea of national literature as a self-enclosed entity significantly different from other entities of the same kind is central to her conception of world literature, according to which national literary "capital" continuously strives for domination. Casanova writes: "Through its essential link with language – itself always national, since invariably appropriated by national authorities as a symbol of identity – literary heritage is a matter of foremost national interest. Because language is at once an affair of state and the material out of which literature is made, literary resources are inevitably concentrated, at least initially, within the boundaries of the nation itself" (Casanova 2004: 34).

The creation of nation states, just like the emergence of national literatures in national languages, is founded on the same principle of differentiation. By asserting their differences through rivalry and competition in 16th century Europe, they "gave rise to the international political space in its earliest form" (Casanova 2004: 35). (Casanova's claim again needs further clarification: it relates only to *recent* European history because there is no doubt whatsoever that a complex international political arena existed in antiquity.)

As language is a "marker" of the difference between nations, Casanova writes, language plays a key role in this "nascent political space". But at the same time, language also plays a crucial role in the constitution of national literatures, which is why Casanova sees it as the tissue connecting two emerging systems: the political and the literary.[15] Casanova thus concludes that national literatures are not "a pure emanation of national identity", once and for all bestowed with intrinsic national characteristics; rather, they emerge and develop through literary rivalries that construct the world – or international – literary space (Casanova 2004: 35, 36).

Once such constituent spaces emerge, national literature then begins to free itself from the state: literature now acquires its own rules, genres, techniques, and styles that make it autonomous and, in a sense, anational. Drawing on distinctly aesthetic and literary laws, writers can "refuse both collectively and individually to submit to the national and political definition of literature" (Casanova 2004: 37). In other words, in what could be described as the next stage of internationalization, literature achieves independence and its development is no longer conditioned by extraliterary influences – political or otherwise, but is autonomous, determined by purely literary arguments, principles, and forms. There are two key factors that make possible the existence of "the world republic of letters": the progressive enlargement of the world literary space through the entry of new contestants on the one hand, and on the other the inclination towards autonomy or "emancipation in the face of political (and national) claims to authority" (Casanova 2004: 39). The "oldest" literatures, which have at their disposal the largest literary capital

[15] In the later stages of evolution, the system of world literature also derives from the differentiation of national traditions; by contrast, the "neutralizing" of variety leads to globalization and the homogenization of literary values. Implicit in Casanova's position is a critique of the theory of "hybridization" largely promulgated by American new comparatists.

(assessed in terms of the volume, prestige, and international recognition of their resources), are the most free from any kind of political or ideological instrumentalization: they are the most autonomous. These literary traditions are the least subject to extraliterary influences, because within the autonomous space of literature, such influences "appear only in refracted form, transformed and reinterpreted in literary terms and with literary instruments" (Casanova 2004: 85-86). According to Casanova, the French literary space, having accumulated so much capital over time, became, "the most autonomous literary space of all, which is to say the freest in relation to political and national institutions". Emancipated from political and national interests, it consequently became "denationalized": French literature, freed from external concerns, imposed itself as a "universal … purely literary" model. French literary capital is unique in that it "was able to manufacture a universal literature"; it is the foundation on which world literature is based: "France was the least national of literary nations" (Casanova 2004: 87). As a result, in the 19th century, Paris became the capital of "the world republic of letters": looked to by writers from all nations. However, Paris was not just the place where the purest, most universal literature was produced, nor was it merely the source of the most up to date literary fashions; it was also the place that "consecrated" works that came from the periphery of the world literary space. In Paris, they could be "denationalized", "universalized", and given the seal of "*littérarité*", i.e. declared valid currency in world literature (Casanova 2004: 87). So that she might deflect accusations of "Gallocentrism", Casanova writes that her view of Paris as the "universal" capital of the literary world is in no way connected to an uncritical patriotism; it resulted from "careful historical analysis" (Casanova 2004: 46). As support, she cites a large number of writers who looked to French literary models and who went to Paris as if on a pilgrimage.

We may agree with Prendergast that even though this argument lacks explanatory depth, it does carry weight (Prendergast 2004b: 8). Casanova is especially convincing when she admits that Parisian dominance was of limited duration; when London and New York took the lead in the publishing world, Paris lost its status as the only true capital of "the world republic of letters". Historical facts corroborate Casanova's thesis when it comes to Serbian literature: from the close of the 19th century to just three decades ago, many Serbian writers sought inspiration in Paris, considering it to be the world's literary center. Casanova gives her own examples confirming that Paris had become the symbol of modernity at the turn of the 20th century, visited in the years and decades that followed by writers from "small" literatures on a quest for new artistic expression: Gertrude Stein, Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Llosa, Octavio Paz, Danilo Kiš (Casanova 2004: 87-96). Conceding that Paris has been losing in the commercial competition with the larger publishing capitals in New York and London, Casanova writes that it has nonetheless retained its status as literary capital in another way. Namely, it remains the center of the non-commercial literary production of "autonomous" and "avant-garde" literature, which is not contended for by big publishing houses, and "in France … enjoy[s] a large measure of editorial and critical attention" (Casanova 2004: 168).

Though literature is shaped by a particular language and tradition, it seeks to transcend the borders of national space and compete in the international market. This results in the "paradoxical unity" of world literature. This composite, made up of works that share purely literary characteristics – belonging to certain genres or styles, international themes and motives, traditional poetic forms or narrative techniques – is also dynamic: it is the differences among the national literatures that unify the system (Casanova 2004: 40). The history of world literature, Casanova writes, does not merely

follow the chronological development of national literatures but is a comprehensive history of the "revolts" that have successfully created the conditions for "a pure and autonomous literature", "freed from considerations of political utility": an exclusively "literary" literature (Casanova 2004: 46).

Despite the fact that Casanova does not deny the autonomy of literature, but, to the contrary, attempts to explain how it emerged and determine how it might be permanently achieved, her thesis is open to a serious objection. For Casanova, world literature represents a higher, more autonomous stage of development than national literature. That view is flawed because world literature is comprised not of works that emerge from outside national literature, but of works belonging to various national literatures. Accordingly, world literature can only be as "literary", "universal", "autonomous", or evolutionarily advanced as the individual literatures that comprise it.

THE GREENWICH MERIDIAN

As we have seen, Casanova's "world republic of letters" is comprised not only of contemporary and modern works but also older works that have become a part of the world's literary heritage. On the supposition that the "world republic" begins with du Bellay, it has been in existence for 450 years. During that time, the world literary space has consolidated as it has expanded: the new contestants continuously joining the ever larger literary competition of the "world republic of letters" must comply with its international standard, which unifies the world literary space. For unification to be effected as competition grows, there must be, "a common standard for measuring time, an absolute point of reference unconditionally recognized by all contestants" throughout its territory, relative to its capital. Casanova calls this "common standard"

the "Greenwich meridian of literature" (Casanova 2004: 87).[16] It enables us to "estimate" how far a national literature is from the center of the "world republic of letters", how behind it is from the latest Parisian literary fashions: "Just as the *fictive* line known as the prime meridian, arbitrarily chosen for the determination of longitude, contributes to the *real* organization of the world and makes possible the measure of distances and the location of positions on the surface of the earth, so what might be called the Greenwich meridian of literature makes it possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the center of the world of letters to all those who belong to it." (Casanova 2004: 88)

Of course, "the literary Greenwich meridian" should be understood metaphorically: it is not spatially or temporally fixed, and has nothing to do with any kind of time, real or fictional, but makes it possible to "estimate" how modern a literary work, writer, or national literature is. As it plays a normative role, the "literary Greenwich meridian" can also be understood as a type of canon, which differs from the canon as it is traditionally conceived in that it is constantly changing.[17] Its temporal dimension marks not a date, but "the emergence and then the collective consecration of a text or a work that overturns what had hitherto been recognized as the current standard" (Casanova 2008: 15). The literary Greenwich

[16] Casanova further developed the idea of the literary Greenwich meridian, introduced in *The World Republic of Letters*, in her later work "The Literary Greenwich Meridian: Thoughts on the Temporal Forms of Literary Belief" (2008: 6-23).

[17] In this respect, Pheng Cheah is wrong when he writes that Casanova's conception of world literature is lacking a normative dimension. Che sees the lack of this dimension as the key similarity between Casanova and Moretti's methods, but also as an important aspect of the sociological approach to literature in general (see Cheah 2006: 311). Actually, the similarity between their methods should be sought above all in the fact that both Casanova and Moretti reject the necessity of analyzing literary texts, which is characteristic of the sociological approach as such (see above, pp. 133-135).

meridian marks the moment when the existing system of norms is 'erased' and replaced with a new system. In contrast to Moretti's conception of "new literary history" inspired by the Darwinian theory of biological evolution, Casanova's conception of literary history is inspired by the Russian formalist theory of literary evolution. Literary evolution describes neither the development of lower forms into higher ones, nor the peaceful successive replacement of literary schools and values transmitted from one generation to the next; rather, Casanova considers it to be a "permanent revolution" of the ongoing struggle between contrasting literary languages, genres, and procedures (Casanova 2008: 18). There is another reason why Casanova's view can be aligned with formalism: she believes that literary evolution, at least in its most recent stage marked by international competition, is autonomous and independent of politics and social history, and that it is driven by a preoccupation with novelty: "I subscribe", she writes, "to Shklovsky's famous precept: 'A new form makes its appearance not in order to express a new content, but rather, to replace an old form that has already outlived its artistic usefulness'" (Casanova 2008: 18).

The way in which Casanova describes the process of the consecration (or canonization) of aesthetic reference points also bears the stamp of formalism. The emergence of a new canon is conditioned by the appearance of a new, original work: "There are works that 'mark their time' because they change the formerly accepted time" (Casanova 2008: 12). New works not only challenge the existing system of norms, the current canon, but establish a new canon; in other words, they produce new aesthetic values. A work that through its appearance "marks a date" and diverts the course of literary evolution now becomes "the yardstick by which subsequent works will be measured". In the next stage, this new "measure" or, in formalist terminology, new canon, strives to exert its influence over the largest number of works, over all of the

rivals competing on the terrain of the "world republic of letters": "The literary time-mark becomes the model to which are compared (including for rejection or refutation, which is another kind of recognition) those writers who, aware of this new measure, this innovation, claim it as a yardstick by which to measure their own practice. [The new work] opens an entirely new aesthetic period that would not have been possible without the appearance of this work, which is not to say that the works compared with it are simple imitations or reproductions. It means simply that some of those who recognize and celebrate this mutation begun to write (or pass critical judgments or publish) with respect precisely to this measure." (Casanova 2008: 15). Although Casanova does not say so explicitly, it may be concluded that the wheel of evolution continues to revolve, and that the newly-marked date will last only until "the next geographical catastrophe is precipitated by a new painter or writer of original talent".[18] From this it follows that in Casanova's opinion, innovation does not only drive literary evolution but – as the formalists also tacitly implied – it is the gold standard of aesthetic judgment in literature.[19]

But according to Casanova, there is not just one "time-mark", one literary canon. Within the world literary space, multiple literary canons that are not necessarily

[18] This quotation is taken from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust 1983: VI, 22). Almost concurrently with the Russian formalists, but independently of them, Proust formulated the idea of innovation as a force that leads to change in literature and art in general. On Proust's innovations and artistic skill as a novelist, see Marčetić 1997: 7-9.

[19] Excluded from this process of ever-changing literary values are classic works which, in Casanova's account, can never lose either their relevance or, as a result, their value. She explains that classics pass through two stages of consecration. First, when they enter the world literary space, they achieve the status of "modern" works and become part of the "provisional present"; then, they become part of the "continuous present". Classics are exempt from changes to literary fashions and tastes, from literary competition and contestation; they embody eternal values (Casanova 2008: 21).

"synchronous" with the international timeline of the "literary republic" can co-exist. Of course, that comes at a price. If writers fail to go along with the literary fashion that rules in the center, they risk remaining marginal: undiscovered in the self-enclosed, limited space of their national literatures that are by definition located on the periphery of the "world republic of letters". Casanova writes that some national literary classics are unknown to the rest of the world (Casanova 2008: 15). These works have not set their clocks to the literary Greenwich meridian. This facet of Casanova's theory approaches Moretti's center-periphery distinction, despite the fact that this distinction leads her, as it led Moretti, to problematic conclusions: she considers that what she calls "small" literatures must suffer from anachronism. In her formulation, anachronism is but another word for provincialism and is characteristic of literatures that do not have a history or tradition of their own (Casanova 2004: 90).[20] As innovation is the main criterion of literary evolution, it is not hard to reach the conclusion that the literary works on the pole opposite to innovation and "modernity" – "anachronous" works – are of no or almost no value to her. Contrary to what Casanova claims, there is no reason to suppose that anachronisms are particular to "small" and "peripheral" literatures; "great" literatures can become anachronous while innovative literatures can appear on the periphery. That said, Casanova seems to implicitly concede this point when she contends that the "literary meridian", as the measure of modernity, "is not located in a single place" (Casanova 2008: 9).

It could be said that Casanova further supports this point by citing Faulkner's novels to illustrate how new literary trends emerge. She writes that thousands of kilometers from

[20] Here Casanova cites Eliot's essay, "What Is a Classic?" Casanova writes that Eliot describes the literary provincialism of less mature literatures as, "not a provincialism of space, but of time", and considers it to be a kind of "structural anachronism" (Casanova 2008: 21).

the center of the world literary republic – i.e. Paris, deep in a province of the American south, Faulkner created a new novelistic form. However, no sooner does she make this claim than she seems to deny the possibility that the "literary meridian", at least in this case, could be moved from Paris to Oxford, in the American state of Mississippi. Faulkner did create a new measure of modernity, but it was not legalized, Casanova writes, until it was consecrated in Paris by the greatest "intellectual mandarin" of that time, Jean-Paul Sartre, who, in his famous review of *The Sound and the Fury*, called Faulkner "one of the greatest novelists of the century" (Casanova 2004: 131).[21] Sartre's "benediction" opened the way to the Nobel Prize (1949) and simultaneously secured for Faulkner an army of fans and followers who broadened the appeal of his work: "The Nobel Prize … was a direct consequence of this Parisian benediction" (Casanova 2004: 131). It is clear from this example that for Casanova, Paris is always and without exception the capital of the "world republic of letters". A new novelistic canon can emerge in the American south or in Latin America (with Cortázar, Márquez, Fuentes, etc.), but as such it must be validated in one place only: the capital of the "world republic of letters", Paris.

BIPOLAR WORLD

Casanova distinguishes two poles in all national literary spaces and the "world republic of letters" at large: the national and the international. At the international or autonomous end of the "world republic of letters" are the oldest and richest literatures. They have reached the greatest degree of "denationalization" and "littérisation", freed from the considerations of social and political utility that dominate

[21] This aspect of Casanova's work has also drawn criticism from Zoran Milutinović (See Milutinović 2014: 718-719).

the "small" and still insufficiently emancipated literatures (Casanova 2004: 108-9). National literatures are also divided into two "sectors" – one "literary", denationalized, autonomous, and cosmopolitan, and the other "national" and political: "the world of letters must be conceived as a composite of the various national literary spaces, which are themselves bipolar and differentially situated in the world structure according to the relative attraction exerted upon them by its national and international poles" (Casanova 2004: 108). It follows from those polarities, Casanova continues, that a distinction emerges between "national" and "international" writers: those who observe national or "popular" models of literature and those who, to the contrary, adopt the universal model of world literature in their struggle to emancipate their national literary spaces. In Casanova's opinion, writers who gravitate towards the national pole are as a rule conservative, anachronous, and provincial, while those who turn their gaze towards the center of the "world republic of letters" are modern, cosmopolitan, and revolutionary. Her vision of a "bipolar" world literary space clearly presents a reductionist view of both world and national literature, as evidenced by the very examples that she cites.

At the national pole of Spanish literary space are Miguel Delibes and Camilo José Cela; at its international pole, Juan Benet. In the German literary space, Casanova lists Gruppe 47 as occupying a national position (comprised of Hans Werner Richter, Ilse Aichinger, Ingerborg Bachmann, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Peter Hadndke, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Uwe Johnson, Siegfried Lenz, etc.), and Arno Schmidt, an international one. Although Casanova's view of German writers is unusual, to say the least, seeing that she puts writers as diverse as Böll and Grass; Enzensberger and Handke; Hildesheimer and Lenz in the same national context, Serbian readers would find the examples she draws from Yugoslav, i.e. Serbian,

literature even more unusual. Dragan Jeremić and Dobirca Ćosić are featured in her model as writers who exist as the "national" pole of Serbian literary space, while Danilo Kiš is cited as an example of an "international writer" *par excellence* (Casanova 2004:110, 280). Although Jeremić was not a writer but a literary critic, it is clear that he is featured in her model because of his well-known polemic with Kiš. Ćosić, on the other hand, exists as a "national" writer more for political than literary reasons, considering that Casanova presents him as, "the former president of Serbia and the author of immensely popular national novels conceived on the Tolstoyan model" (Casanova 2004: 280).[22] National writers who predominated in the "chronically anachronistic literary space of the former Yugoslavia", a country Casanova considers to be both "completely closed in on itself" and subsumed under the Soviet sphere of influence, were, in her view, narrowly restricted to nationalist and political themes and "neorealist" formalism (Casanova 2004: 114-115 and 198-9). Kiš, as both an international writer and one who adopted the latest Parisian literary fashions, succeeded where other compatriot writers did not: in crossing the border of his "ignorant" and "provincial" literary environment,[23] gaining international recognition, and being "consecrated" in the very capital of the "world republic of letters", Paris. The picture Casanova paints of Kiš' fate as

[22] Casanova would have better illustrated her thesis had she cited Mihailo Lalić and Branko Ćopić (*Prolom*), or the younger writers who wrote what is termed "stvarnosna proza" ("reality prose") (Vidosav Stevanović, Milisav Savić, etc.) instead of Jeremić. Ćosić was not the president of Serbia but the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

[23] Here, Casanova in a footnote cites *Čas anatomije* (*The Anatomy Lesson*) (Casanova 2004: 113). But in *The Anatomy Lesson*, Kiš writes that it is the literary "čaršija" that is "ignorant" and not the Yugoslav literary milieu as a whole. *Translator's addendum*: *čaršija*, which is a Turkish loan word in Serbian originally meaning "market" or "bazaar", can also refer to the hearsay of "the word on the street" and could be translated here as "rumour mill".

an international writer in the backwater Yugoslav milieu has a principal focus: "His work, translated already into several languages, was beginning to make its way into a wider world. In short, everything conspired to put him at odds with the national intellectuals of his country" (Casanova 2004: 114). She writes that Kiš was accused of plagiarism by nationalist intellectuals because he tried to "revise the rules of the game" by employing literary practices imported from the Parisian capital in *Grobnici za Borisa Davidovića* (*A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*) – which she incorrectly calls a novel (Casanova 2004: 114). Casanova thinks that these charges prove her initial thesis, and show Kiš' innovative narrative techniques to be incompatible with the conservative literary environment from which it emerged: "The accusation of plagiarism brought against him was credible only in a closed literary world that had not yet been touched by any of the great literary, aesthetic, and formal revolutions of the twentieth century. Only in a world that was unaware of 'Western' literary innovations … could a text composed with the whole of international fictional modernity in mind be seen as a simple copy of some other work" (Casanova 2004: 114).

There is no need to explain to Serbian readers that Casanova's overview of Serbian and Yugoslav literature is erroneous and crudely oversimplified. The same can be said of her overview of Kiš' literary career and the meaning she ascribes to the polemic he waged with his critics. The extent of her misrepresentations is such that there are enough falsehoods and half-truths to fill an entire, separate work, thereby surpassing the confines of this book. As it happens, such a work has already been written by Zoran Milutinović ("Territorial Trap: Danilo Kiš, Cultural Geography, and Geopolitical Imagination", Milutinović 2014: 715-738). He persuasively demonstrates that Casanova's understanding of Yugoslav literature, and by extension of Kiš' works,

is based entirely upon a series of stereotypes formed in the West during the Cold War on the status of the writer in Eastern European, i.e. "communist", literatures. Building on these clichés, Casanova presents Yugoslav and Serbian literature – which she incorrectly claims was under Moscow's sway (Casanova 2004: 95) – as being ultimately subservient to political and national goals, completely uninterested in questions of literature itself. Any cosmopolitan writer, any artist fully engrossed in "literariness", as Casanova deems Kiš to have been, naturally had to be scorned and rejected by such an environment. Kiš could only receive recognition for his work in an international sphere, in the "world republic of letters".

Milutinović rightly observes that on top of this old stereotype, Casanova adds another, which appeared at the start of the 1990s in French media coverage of the civil war in socialist Yugoslavia. She makes the claim that "the Serbs' avowed submission to Moscow encouraged the Croats to distinguish themselves by choosing Paris as their intellectual pole", which misrepresents Serbian literature as being pro-Russian, suckled on the myth of Pan-Slavism, and biased in favor of the communist revolution (Casanova 2004: 383). Milutinović correctly states that this claim falsifies historical facts about Serbian literature, which entered its modern period under obvious French influence. He states, moreover, that it is based on stereotypes that portray Serbs as hostile towards the West and Western culture. The Western media was inundated by such stereotypes in the 1990s in order to demonize one side in the Yugoslav Civil War: Serbs. But the stereotypes were deployed to insidious effect, and led to the "demonization of the culture and tradition of one nation", Serbia, which is confirmed by many of the assumptions made in Casnova's book. "*The World Republic of Letters* is bogged down with 'popular geopolitics': sequences of images and impressions embedded

in popular culture and mass media that are produced and disseminated in order to tell the public which side of the war 'we' are on" (Milutinović 2014: 733-734).

It should be added to Milutinović's critique that Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* is not just riddled with stereotypes of "popular geopolitics"; it is also discredited by a lack of even rudimentary knowledge of Serbian and Yugoslav literature. Serbian readers of her book would be less shocked by the number of stereotypes it contains than by her total ignorance of the history of Serbian and Yugoslav literature and, by extension, of Kiš' works, which she holds in high esteem. Apart from *The Anatomy Lesson* and *Homo Poeticus*, Casanova seems never to have picked up a novel or story by Kiš, and everything that she writes about Serbian literature clearly shows that she has not seen let alone read a single book by a single Serbian writer, whether "national" or "international". Given her unfamiliarity with these works, Casanova had no recourse but to rely on commonplaces and stereotypes, which does a great disservice to her theory.

Casanova's ignorance of Serbian literature should not be seen as a sign of ill-will towards Serbs: none of the other "small" literatures in Casanova's reading fared any better. Prendergast, in his critique of Casanova's work, illustrates this by reviewing her approach to Irish literature. Casanova considers it a typical example of a "small" literature struggling against the domination of a "great" literature – in this instance, English literature. But she offers an inadequate account of the historical and cultural context that gave rise to the evolution of Irish literature and thus incorrectly interprets the significance (and meaning) of the words of the great Irish writers Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett. Furthermore, her portrayal of Irish literature is also informed by the above-mentioned stereotype, according to which literature

develops because "small" nations are "battling for a place in a literary sun blocked by the shadow of tyrant languages and literatures" (Prendergast 2004b: 17-19). It may be concluded that the problem with Casanova's literary interpretations is, in part, methodological. This stems from the fact that, like Moretti, Bayard, and other proponents of not reading, Casanova simply does not read literary works. Sociological research alone is insufficient for the writing of literary history, especially if that history aims to describe the *autonomous* development of literature, a goal Casanova ostensibly advocates throughout her book.

It is not just the method that Casanova employs in *The World Republic of Letters* that warrants criticism, but also the evaluative criteria she uses. Although she never explicitly states that "international" literature trumps national literature in a *literary* sense, this view is tacitly implied in her evolutionary belief that literature develops towards higher, superior forms in both national and international space: "Paris also attracted writers who came to the center to equip themselves with the knowledge and technical expertise of literary modernity in order then to revolutionize the literature of their homelands through the innovations that they brought back with them" (Casanova 2004: 95-6). Literature that gravitates towards the autonomous "denationalized" pole has succeeded in all respects, even aesthetically. "The autonomous pole of the world space is therefore essential to its very constitution, which is to say its *littérisation* and its gradual denationalization […] the great heroes of literature invariably emerge only in association with the specific power of an autonomous and international literary capital. The case of James Joyce – rejected in Dublin, ignored in London, banned in New York, lionized in Paris – is undoubtedly the best example" (Casanova 2004: 109).

The claim that literature that has been freed from extraliterary influences is not only more "pure" but more valuable artistically than literature that has not would almost be plausible, were it not for the fact that arguments drawn from literature itself advise a more cautious approach. For example, it is easy to agree with the claim that, among those who read novels, there are many who consider Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to be the greatest novelists in the history of the genre. However, when fans of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy make this claim, they usually do not cite "pure" formal reasons; the criteria according to which they proclaim these writers to be the best novelists of all time are *content-based*, of an *extra-literary* (philosophical, religious, psychological) nature. On the other hand, there is also no shortage of readers who consider that the novelistic form and endeavor is perfected through profundity of thought, psychological complexity, or dramatic plot lines. Such a reader will consider Flaubert and Henry James, for example, alongside Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, for their shared central concern with form, or narrative structure. Thus, Flaubert and James are ranked among the top classic novelists: almost as highly as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, if for completely different reasons. Readers of these novels admire less the content than the *form*, style, and narrative techniques. The criteria according to which literary works may be evaluated are diverse and can be equally valid, which is why it would be very wrong to favor only one, regardless of which.

Finally, also incorrect is Casanova's claim that formal considerations appear in "small" literatures only once literature has been freed from social and political functions: "Formal preoccupations, which is to say specifically literary concerns, appear in small literatures only in a second phase, when an initial stock of literary resources has been accumulated and the first international artists find themselves in a position to challenge the aesthetic assumptions

associated with realism and to exploit the revolutionary advances" already acknowledged in "great" literatures (Casanova 2004: 200). Thus, according to Casanova, when "small" literatures are still "national" and dominated by considerations of social and political utility during the first phase of their development, they are devoid of "formal", which is to say autonomous, artistic concerns. Such reasoning defies common sense: to take just one example, to claim that Laza Kostić gave no thought to the form of his poems would be to demonstrate a profound ignorance of the nature of literature. It is hard to imagine literature, or any art, without "formal preoccupations", at least during one stage of its development. Casanova's view of form as an external "preoccupation" that can be added to or subtracted from a literary work demonstrates the extent of the theoretical failings of her approach. Such holes in her theory can largely be explained by the fact that she does not reach her conclusions by reading literary works. Her "world republic of letters", like Moretti's "new literary history", suffers most from a lack of philological rigor and insufficient grounding in the close reading of actual literary works.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS A PHILOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVISM

The debate over the fate of comparative literature in contemporary literary scholarship has been accompanied by a renewed interest in the work of its founders, particularly in the methods used by Auerbach in his key works published after the Second World War. The fact that there is a need to revisit older and broader-reaching models of comparative literature is symptomatic of the crisis of comparative literature. In Germany and France during the nineties, three volumes of Auerbach's selected essays were published, and in the United States in 1992, a scholarly conference was dedicated to his legacy as well as the place of the philological-historical method in modern literary studies.[1] On the

[1] The conference was held at Stanford University in October 1992. The proceedings from this conference were published under the title *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology: The Legacy of Erich Auerbach* (edited by Seth Lerer, 1966). Among the contributing authors are Stephen Nichols, Hayden White, Geoffrey Green, Hans Urich Gumbrecht, and Luiz Costa-Lima. An international conference dedicated to Auerbach's *Mimesis* in 1996 was organized by the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Groningen. More than 100 participants from 12 countries participated in this conference.

occasion of the 50th anniversary of the first English-language translation of Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1953),[2] Princeton University published a jubilee edition with an extensive introduction by Said. Auerbach's *Mimesis*, cited by Wellek as an example of a "true work on comparative literature" (Wellek 1958: 93), has been the subject of numerous reviews and critical articles in the past two decades highlighting previously underemphasized aspects of the book and considering its relevance in terms of contemporary, or new, global comparative literature.

Serbian translations of a selection of Auerbach's essays were collected in a work entitled *Filologija svetske književnosti: šest ogleda o stilu i viđenju stvarnosti* (*The Philology of World Literature: Six Essays on Style and Perceptions of Reality*).[3] This was the first of Auerbach's books to appear in Serbian after *Mimesis*, which had been published three decades earlier. Another of Auerbach's works has since been translated into Serbian: his famous study on Baudelaire.[4] *Filologija svetske književnosti* is a translation of a selection of Auerbach's essays published in Germany in 1992 under the same title (*Philologie der Weltliteratur*). Included in that volume are some of Auerbach's more important short works produced from the early 1930s, when "Montaigne the Writer" (1932) appeared, through the beginning of the 1950s, when the titular essay "The Philology of World Literature" (1952) was written.

Had Auerbach not written *Mimesis*, he would probably be remembered for his earlier work, *Dante: Poet of the*

[2] The full title is *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. The first German edition was published in Switzerland (Bern, 1946). The Serbian edition was translated by Milan Tabaković, first printed in 1978 by Nolit.

[3] *Filologija svetske književnosti: šest ogleda o stilu i viđenju stvarnosti*, trans. Tomislav Bekić (Sremski Karlovci – Novi Sad, 2009).

[4] "Bodlerovo Cveće zla i uzvišeno", Poezija, XI (2006), no. 33-34, pp. 88-113 ("The Aesthetic Dignity of the 'Fleurs du Mal'", see n.6).

Secular World (1929),[5] which secured him an appointment at the University of Marburg where, succeeding Spitzer, he taught Romance philology. In Marburg, Auerbach translated Giambattista Vico's *The New Science* and wrote a study on Herder (1932). The works of these two thinkers, to say nothing of Dante, had a decisive influence on his relationship towards literature and history. Because of anti-Jewish legislation and persecution in Germany, Auerbach was forced to emigrate to Turkey where at the Istanbul state university he again succeeded Spitzer, at the Department of Romance Languages. Auerbach finished *Neue Dantestudien* (*New Dante Studies*, 1944) in Istanbul, which he had started writing in Germany and which contained his well-known essay "Figura",[6] the first version of which had been published in 1933. During his time in Istanbul, Auerbach wrote his most important work, *Mimesis*, over a period of three years, from 1942 to 1945. Then, he again followed in Spitzer's footsteps and emigrated to America where he was appointed professor of medieval literature in the Department of Romance Philology at Yale. He next published *Vier Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der französischen Bildung* (*Four Studies in the History of French Thought*, 1951), which included the previously mentioned essay on Baudelaire, considered by Wellek to be one of Auerbach's best works. In the early 1950s, translations of *Mimesis* into English, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages appeared in succession, and Auerbach gained a reputation as a world-renowned comparatist. Auerbach's last great project was devoted to the Middle Ages. This work, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, which he saw as a

[5] Said considers this book to be Auerbach's "most exciting and intense work" (Said 2003: xiv).

[6] An English version of this essay together with his study on Baudelaire appears in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Meridian Books, 1959) – trans.

supplement to *Mimesis*, was finished shortly before his death in 1957 and published posthumously in 1958, translated into English a few years later.

Auerbach and his *Mimesis* have both shared a fate largely determined by historical circumstances and enjoy an unparalleled standing in the history of comparative literature. Although *Mimesis* is hailed by most critics as an exceptional work and a validation of comparative literature, it has also been the target of censure. The most searing criticism was directed at Auerbach's understanding of "realism". Curtius, for example, took Auerbach to task for associating "realism" with the story of the passion of Christ and the emergence of "mixed" genres, as opposed to seeing it as a distinct genre in the classical rhetorical "doctrine of the three styles" (Curtius 1952: 57-70). Wellek, while acknowledging Auerbach's erudition and broad comparative approach, criticized *Mimesis* for being only superficially "a general history of occidental realism", as "realism" is inadequately defined[7] (Wellek 1954: 301). Although Auerbach had preempted such criticism in *Mimesis*, writing that he would not be dealing with realism in general because "the question was to what degree and in what manner realistic subjects were treated seriously, problematically, or tragically" (Auerbach 1974: 556), he nevertheless addressed the question again later. In his reply to Curtius, he explained that his book was not an exploration of the doctrine of styles but the specific styles of particular writers, and, like the

[7] The use of the concept of "realism" in Auerbach's *Mimesis* is also questioned by contemporary authors. For example, Terry Eagleton, in a review of the anniversary edition of *Mimesis*, calls Auerbach a "romantic populist" and criticizes him for "championing … realism over antiquity". Eagleton also critiques Auerbach for using "realism" as a value term like Lukács does, and understands *Mimesis* as a history of realism – which Auerbach had cautioned against. Nevertheless, Eagleton writes that *Mimesis* is one of the great works of literary scholarship, and acknowledges Auerbach's "scholarly erudition" (Eagleton 2003: 17-19).

true philologist that he was, he rebutted Curtius' call for a broader theoretical approach: "If it had been possible," he writes, "I would have avoided all general terms and instead suggested ideas to the reader by the mere presentation of a sequence of passages" (Auerbach 1953: 16). By advocating close reading and literary history, Auerbach explicated two of the main components of the method he used in *Mimesis* and his other works. In order to grasp the essence of this method, further consideration will be given to Auerbach's responses to the critics of *Mimesis*.

Wellek's critique, which he unfolds in the work "Auerbach's Special Realism", has two main strands. First, Wellek writes that although exceptional in many ways, *Mimesis* is flawed because Auerbach fails to, "define his terms and to make his suppositions clear from the outset". As Wellek considers it "an illusion … to believe that textual analysis can be successfully carried out without a clear theoretical framework" (Wellek 1954: 304-5), he criticizes Auerbach for being suspicious of modern conceptual categorizations, relying instead on comparatively limited examples generated by personal artistic insight. Second, Wellek criticizes Auerbach's historical approach as it leads to "profound skepticism" and a rejection of values, "even artistic values". He writes that Auerbach's interpretative approach unites historicism with existentialism: it unites that which is particular and determined by the spirit of the times with that which is universal, general, and archetypal in a work. Therein lies both the specificity of Auerbach's method and its greatest flaw, because there is a contradiction, Wellek argues, between that which is "historical", which is to say ephemeral, and that which is "existential", or unhistorical (Wellek 1954: 306).

By calling Auerbach's method a conflation of historicism and – in the jargon of the times – a kind of "existentialism",

Wellek was indicating a key feature of *Mimesis*. Auerbach put forward his view of the philological and historical approach to literature towards the end of his life, in 1952, in the works "Giambattista Vico und die Idee der Philologie" ("Giambattista Vico and the Idea of Philology") and "Philologie der *Weltliteratur*" ("Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'"). [8] He later synthesized and elaborated on ideas from those two works to produce his most extensive methodological text, the introduction to his posthumous work, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, characteristically entitled "Purpose and Method". He had of course set out his method and purpose in his earlier works, including *Mimesis*, but these three works stand out as his most detailed and coherent attempts.

Auerbach emphasized the influence of Vico's philosophy of history on even his earliest works. In "Giambattista Vico and the Idea of Philology", Auerbach writes that Vico's *New Science* can be seen as "the first work of hermeneutical philology", understanding philology as "the epitome of the science of the human, insofar as all humans are historical beings. Philology includes all the disciplines that take this as their subject (including the discipline of history narrowly defined)" (Auerbach 2014: 34-35). In several of his works, and demonstrative of his stand on history, Auerbach writes that we, as heirs of the historicism of Goethe's age, have an advantage over Dante and the writers of his time who had not yet developed what today we call historical awareness: awareness of *difference*, or, as Hans Robert Jauss would put it, awareness of *alterity*. We – unlike Dante, for example, who felt Virgil to be his contemporary, similar in mentality and values – are more sensitive to the differences

[8] It is noted that the Saids' translation of this work is cited here; the Saids chose not to put the title of the work *Weltliteratur* in English as, "An expedient such as 'world literature' betrays the rather unique traditions behind the German word" (Auerbach 1965: 1) – trans.

between people in different historical periods, and as such possess a broader historical perspective than our forebears. Our awareness of the possibilities of aesthetic perfection is far broader and richer than theirs, which allows us to embrace writers as various as Dante, Goethe, Baudelaire, and T. S. Eliot.

This thought is perhaps most lucidly expressed in the opening lines of Auerbach's work "Vico and Aesthetic Historicism", where he writes: "Modern critics of art or of literature consider and admire, with the same preparedness for understanding, Giotto and Michelangelo, Michelangelo and Rembrandt, Rembrandt and Picasso, Picasso and a Persian miniature; or Racine and Shakespeare, Chaucer and Alexander Pope, the Chinese lyrics and T. S. Eliot." (Auerbach 1984: 183) Any preferences critics may have for a particular artist or historical period are not circumscribed by absolute standards and rules but reflect their own personal taste and experience. The "largeness of our aesthetic horizon" has resulted from "our historical perspective; it is based on historism, i.e. on the conviction that every civilization and every period has its own possibilities of aesthetic perfection; that the works of art of the different people and periods, as well as their general forms of life, must be understood as products of variable individual conditions, and have to be judged each by its own development, not by absolute rules of beauty and ugliness" (Auerbach 1984: 183-4).

This view, which Auerbach calls historism[9] or historical perspectivism, emerged in the second half of the 18th

[9] The term *historismus* is used consistently throughout Auerbach's German writings, rendered by English translators as either "historism" or "historicism". It is noted that Auerbach, himself, uses the term "historism" in those papers he wrote in English (cf., for example, "Vico and Aesthetic Historism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Dec. 1949, pp. 110-118). The term "historicism" is used in this chapter where the term is not limited to Auerbach's work, and where used by other authors in their reference to Auerbach's work, or otherwise – trans.

century as a reaction to the aesthetic absolutism of French classicism and was spread through Europe by the advance of the pre-Romantic and Romantic tide. That said, it was given its most cogent expression in Germany; first, by Herder and Goethe and other young poets associated with the *Sturm und Drang* movement, and subsequently, by the Schlegel brothers and other German Romantics. Rejecting the classical conception of beauty by arguing that there are as many aesthetic standards as there are nations and epochs, German Romanticists arrived at a Copernican discovery in the cultural sciences, Auerbach writes (Auerbach 1965: 10). They conceived history as an "organic evolution" of the various manifestations of the divine spirit (*Geist*) exhibited through the endlessly changing and variegated forms of human civilization. Auerbach considers pre-Romantic and Romantic historism to have given rise to what can be described as modern, Hegelian historicism, and thus also to the modern historical sciences, which deal with the history of literature, language, art, legal, and political forms, among other things (Auerbach 1984: 184). Auerbach, describing the age of Goethe in *Mimesis*, writes that in Germany in the second half of the 18th century, intellectual progress brought a new view of history:

> Epochs and societies are not to be judged in terms of a pattern concept of what is desirable absolutely speaking but rather in every case in terms of their own premises; when people reckon among such premises not only material factors like climate and soil but also the intellectual and historical factors; when, in other words, they come to develop a sense of historical dynamics, of the incomparability of historical phenomena and of their constant inner mobility; when they come to appreciate the vital unity of individual epochs, so that each epoch appears as a whole whose character is reflected in each of its manifestations; when, finally, they accept the conviction that the meaning of events cannot be grasped in

> abstract and general forms of cognition and that the material needed to understand it must not be sought exclusively in the upper strata of society and in major political events but also in art, economy, material and intellectual culture, in the depths of the workaday world and its men and women, because it is only there that one can grasp what is unique, what is animated by inner forces, and what, in both a more concrete and a more profound sense, is universally valid: then it is to be expected that those insights will also be transferred to the present and that, in consequence, the present too will be seen as incomparable and unique, as animated by inner forces and in a constant state of development; in other words, as a piece of history whose everyday depths and total inner structure lay claim to our interest both in their origins and in the direction taken by their development (Auerbach 1974: 443-444).

Historism of this kind, according to Auerbach, qualifies philology as a historical science which, by interpreting documents, seeks the truth – the specific truths of an epoch, "as a whole whose character is reflected in each of its manifestations" (Auerbach 1974: 444), not absolute truths that are true of all societies at all times. It can thus be concluded that Auerbach understands philology in a very broad sense: as a type of intellectual history, or, to use the German term, *Geistesgeschichte*, which encompasses *all* historical disciplines, including the history of law and the economy.[10] For Auerbach, the true founder of historism was Vico, whose *New Science* appeared in 1725, half a century before Herder's reflections on history. Vico, in his attempt to understand history, was the first thinker to formulate a theory, "that very nearly represents a final, ingenious solution to the core problem of hermeneutics" (Auerbach 2014: 30). Historism, where this means an awareness of the distinctions between epochs, is but one of the pillars on which

[10] See Auerbach 1965: 15. Wellek notes that Auerbach's method is a unique combination of stylistic analysis, reflections on sociology, and what may broadly be called intellectual history (Wellek 1958: 94).

Vico's "new science" rests. The second pillar is the *senso comune*, the idea that all people share a common inner sense, which Auerbach describes as the subjective foundation of Vico's philological historical method. That idea, which only at first appears contradictory to the above-mentioned relativistic historical perspective, is founded on a belief in the existence of an inner experience common to all human beings, of all nations and epochs: "The *senso comune* is thus not derived from reason. Rather, it is a matter of instinct and habit, in other words, a predisposition. The traditions, laws, and institutions that arise from it are thus not philosophical truths (*verum*). Rather, they are conventional and humanly willed institutions (*certum*), or also *autorità dell'umano arbitrio* (authorized by human will)." *Sensus communis* is not restricted to a particular stage of human development; rather, "all of these stages are already given simultaneously in the human mind, at least potentially" (Auerbach 2014: 31). Vico claims in *New Science* that man can understand only what he himself has made: "there is no knowledge without creation; only the creator has knowledge of what he has created himself; the physical world – *il mondo della natura* – has been created by God; therefore only God can understand it; but the historical or political world, the world of mankind – *il mondo delle nazioni* – can be understood by men because men have made it" (Auerbach 1984: 189). Thus it is precisely the world of mankind that needs to be the subject of human understanding: "Human beings shape the historical world themselves and it is their own; in it, they can observe both the providential plan and themselves and their own history too. In this way, the *sensus communis* becomes not just the objective principle of a historical development in which everything is in tune with itself. It also becomes the subjective foundation of how to understand history and thus of the kind of philological hermeneutics in which Vico was engaged."[11]

[11] Auerbach 2014: 31-32. See Auerbach 1992: 70 and 71.

Vico achieved by this theory the authoritative standing of the historical sciences which, unlike the natural sciences, stem from human behavior, from those "potentialities of the human mind (*dentro le modificazioni della nostra medesima mente umana*)", in which are found "all possible forms of human life and thinking, as created and experienced by men", and which thus enable us to reconstruct human history from "the depth of our own consciousnesses" (Auerbach 1984: 190). *Certum*, which is all that has been created by man – historical or political experience as opposed to the physical or natural, is the object of the hermeneutical philology that Vico calls *nuova arte critica*. This is why one of Vico's central ideas concerns the existence of an inner language common to all human beings, *lingua mentale comune*, which is manifest across different nations at different times and merely exemplified in different forms. According to Vico, because man created the historical, as opposed to the divine, world, his "unchanging" nature must be a function of the various modifications of the human spirit throughout historical development (i.e. the *natura* created by God): "Divine Providence makes human nature change from period to period, and in each period the institutions are in full accordance with the human nature of the period; the distinction between human nature and human history disappears; as Vico puts it, human history is a permanent Platonic state" (Auerbach 1984: 198).

Human nature cannot be viewed from a vantage point outside of history, but must be understood as being pervaded by common essential characteristics or genius (*Geist*) in each historical stage. As such, it is at once subsumed to that which changes and that which is everywhere the same despite history. This, in Auerbach's opinion, is the most important and most original contribution to philology made by Vico in *New Science*. Philology is, "the epitome of the science of the human, insofar as all humans are historical

beings", and its very existence rests on, "the assumption that people are able to understand one another"; despite the breadth of the historical horizon, there will always be a "world of and for humanity that is common to us all" (Auerbach 2014: 34-35). Thus, historical sensitivity, as per Vico and Auerbach, comprehends the variations among all nations and epochs as well as their common characteristics, which Wellek termed the "existential".

In this respect, Auerbach's philological-historical method is best encapsulated by the term *historical perspectivism*. As opposed to historicism, which is often equated with *historical relativism*, the term *historical perspectivisim* is less suggestive of the untenable relativistic implications that Wellek wrote of when he criticized Auerbach's ultimately "profound skepticism" and "denial of values". Auerbach's historical perspectivism can be described as an attempt to understand works within the context of their composition and come to a more comprehensive understanding of history as a whole. Auerbach writes that this approach is second nature to modern man:

> Our historicism in esthetic questions has become so self-evident to us that we are scarcely aware of it. We bring equal readiness for understanding to the art, literature, and music of the most divergent peoples and epochs. The cultures which we call primitive and which it cost Vico so much effort to understand (to most of his contemporaries they were not intelligible or even interesting) have long possessed a very special charm for us. […] in the esthetic field our power of adaptation to diverse cultural forms or epochs is constantly brought into play, often in the course of a single visit to a museum or a single concert, and it may even prove indispensable to our understanding of a film, an illustrated magazine, or a travel poster. That is historicism, in the same sense as, in Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Monsieur Jourdain's everyday speech turns out, to his vast

> astonishment, to be prose. Most of us are no more aware of our historicism than Monsieur Jourdain was of his prose. (Auerbach 1965: 11)

As Auerbach himself rightly notes in his response to Wellek's criticism, such an approach need not result in "eclecticism" or an incapacity for judgment. Although Auerbach rejects the classical categories on which value judgments are based, he does not reject judgment so much as the practice of looking for categories of judgment in the extrahistorical and absolute. According to Auerbach, value judgments should be based on that which is universal to all human beings and can be perceived in particular historical forms. There is no risk of relativism, he writes, because by comprehending the particularities of an epoch, we do not lose the faculty of judgment but on the contrary acquire it and gradually learn how to discover "flexible" standards of judgment: "Little by little we learn what the various works meant in their own epochs and what they mean in the perspective of the three millennia concerning the literary activity of which we have some knowledge. Lastly, we learn what they mean to us personally, here and now. All this is a sufficient basis on which to judge a work, that is, to view it in relation to the conditions under which it came into being and to assign a rank to it." (Auerbach 1965: 13) That is ground enough to dismiss objections that historicism necessarily leads to an incapacity for judgment and "eclecticism". Departing from Vico's ideas of the universal elements of human experience, Auerbach's historical perspectivism does not result in the "anarchy of values" as Wellek claimed, but to the contrary, provides a basis for the evaluation of "what elements in common the most significant works have". In other words, such consideration can delineate the universal in the drama of historical development – although it is unable to advance a theoretical formulation "expressed in abstract or historical terms" (Auerbach 1965: 13).

INTERPRETATIVE PHILOLOGY

The second aspect of the philological method that Auerbach calls attention to is hermeneutical and pertains to how a text is to be approached. The "trick of this trade", as Spitzer would say, is "reading, close reading". The philologist must pay scrupulous attention to reading material and have a sharp eye for stylistic and linguistic detail. Auerbach uses this method in *Mimesis*. The work focuses on textual extracts and characteristic motifs that, as units of style – or stylemes, play an important part in establishing through hermeneutic analysis the meaning of the complete texts. In his analysis of specific motifs, Auerbach also addresses the role and meaning of a work in the broader context of literary tradition as well as its general social and historical setting. In other words, Auerbach's interpretation moves from specific parts to the whole: from a work to the works that comprise a genre, an epoch of a national or European literature, and, sometimes, a particular social-historical moment. Auerbach calls this method interpretative philology and describes it most comprehensively in the last chapter of *Mimesis*, in which he analyzes works by modernists Woolf, Proust, and Joyce. He observes that there is a shift in emphasis in the works of these writers who privilege "any random fragment plucked from the course of a life" over "the great exterior turning points and blows of fate" characteristic of the traditional novel. Modernist writers appear to believe that minor happenings more thoroughly and effectively portray "the totality of [the subject's] fate" than great and dramatic turning points. This is also reflected in the fragmentary, discontinuous narrative techniques they employ. They have more confidence, "in syntheses through full exploitation of an everyday occurrence than in a chronologically well-ordered total treatment which accompanies the subject from beginning to end, attempts not to omit anything externally

important, and emphasizes the great turning points of destiny" (Auerbach 1974: 547-8). Auerbach writes that the technique of modern writers to credit random fragments with the power of portraying totality or synthesis – what could be described as their particularism – can be compared with the method used by certain philologists, including himself. The following passage both elaborates and elucidates Auerbach's method so will be cited in its entirety:

> It is possible to compare this technique of modern writers with that of certain modern philologists who hold that the interpretation of a few passages from *Hamlet*, *Phèdre*, or *Faust* can be made to yield more, and more decisive, information about Shakespeare, Racine, or Goethe and their times than would a systematic and chronological treatment of their lives and works. Indeed, the present book may be cited as an illustration. I could never have written anything in the nature of a history of European realism; the material would have swamped me; I should have had to enter into hopeless discussions concerning the delimitation of the various periods and the allocation of the various writers to them, and above all concerning the definition of the concept of realism. Furthermore, for the sake of completeness, I should have had to deal with some things of which I am but casually informed, and hence to become acquainted with them *ad hoc* by reading up on them (which, in my opinion, is a poor way of acquiring and using knowledge); and the motifs which direct my investigation, and for the same of which it is written, would have been completely buried under a mass of factual information which has long been known and can easily be looked up in reference books. As opposed to this I see the possibility of success and profit in a method which consists in letting myself be guided by a few motifs which I have worked out gradually and without a specific purpose, and in trying them out on a series of texts which have become familiar and vital to me in the course of my philological activity, for I am convinced that these basic motifs in the history of the representation of reality – provided I have

> seen them correctly – must be demonstrable in any random realistic text. (Auerbach 1974: 548)

The most distinctive feature of Auerbach's *Mimesis* as a history of world literature is also the most unusual: it is like a modernist novel in that the subject is presented not chronologically or systematically but selectively, through the analysis of short and seemingly arbitrary extracts from texts that are part of the Western European literary tradition. However, although his attention is always focused on one of the extracts, his analysis extends beyond it: illuminating not just the extract but its larger context, which sometimes includes all of the works by the same author together with works by similar authors, as well as the style and spirit (*Geist*) of the age. For example, through his analysis of a characteristic passage of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Auerbach points to the most significant features of the modern novel: subjectivism, the shift in narrative emphasis from exterior factors to inner processes, an atmosphere of pessimism. He also situates aspects of the novel in a broader social-historical context, explaining that in the years during and after World War I, chaotic forces affecting history and reality found expression in those novels that rendered torn and chaotic consciousnesses. Inner crises were in fact "a symptom of … confusion and helplessness" that, among other things, represent "a mirror of the decline of our world" (Auerbach 1974: 551). Auerbach's approach to literary texts is twofold: on the one hand, it involves the close reading of texts and grammatical and stylistic analysis; while on the other hand, it locates a text and its meaning within a larger literary and social-historical context.

Auerbach's method is outwardly similar to Spitzer's stylistics, to which it is most often compared, as they are both primarily text-oriented philological approaches. But there are significant differences between them: Auerbach employed

a historical and hermeneutic approach while Spitzer was a proponent of what may most accurately be described as formalist, immanent criticism. For Auerbach, a work can be fully understood only in the context of its historical horizon and the epoch from which it emerged. By contrast, Spitzer is skeptical of historicism and believes that stylistic features of a text can be studied independently of historical context. Spitzer is also less interested in generalizations and comparisons, seeking, above all, the unique spirit of a work, the deviations in the use of language, which he believed to reveal the mind, or psychogram, of the author. Where Spitzer looks for that which is unique to a work or a writer's art, seeing literary tradition as an agglomeration of unconnected, self-sufficient systems, Auerbach strives to situate the text under analysis within the broader context of genre, literary style, or historical period. Auerbach himself points to the difference between Spitzer's method and his own. Spitzer's interpretations are always directed towards an "exact understanding" of specific stylistic approaches, works, or authors. By contrast, Auerbach writes, "My purpose is always to write history." And, "I never approach a text as an isolated phenomenon" (Auerbach 1965: 19, 20).

Such a view of philology readily lends itself to applications in the study of world literature. Auerbach writes about this in his last work, "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'". The very concept of *world literature* evolved out of a sense of historical perspective and an awareness of national cultural diversity. This is not to say that Auerbach considered *world literature* to be a geographic experience; rather, he saw it in a Goethean light, as a collection of the best, most representative works to emerge from various national literatures. However, it should be noted that Auerbach does not use the term *world literature* in a literal sense but far more narrowly, to denote modern West European and ancient Greek and Roman literature, which are for him, as they

are for Curtius, closely related. The works in Auerbach's canon of *world literature* – despite their historical and national differences – reflect universal humanistic values common to all peoples in all times. The history of world literature, like that of other humanistic disciplines – art and religion, politics and law – is derived from Vico's philology and Goethe's humanism because the material it deals with, the literary heritage of different cultures, affords a view of "an inner history of mankind", and makes it possible for "a conception of man unified in his multiplicity" to be formulated (Auerbach 1969: 4).

Auerbach's view of the relationship between the general and specific in traditions distinguishes his method from Curtius' philology, which he nonetheless cites as an example of impressive humanist scholarship. While Curtius is chiefly interested in the evolution and transformation of rhetorical commonplaces or *topoi*, recurring themes and figures of speech, and literary conventions, Auerbach primarily deals with specific texts and their specific characteristics – particular examples that shed light on the universal: "The characteristic of a good point of departure is its concreteness and its precision on the one hand, and on the other, its potential for centrifugal radiation. A semantic interpretation, a rhetorical trope, a syntactic sequence, the interpretation of one sentence, or a set of remarks made at a given time and in a given place – any of these can be a point of departure, but once chosen it must have radiating power, so that with it we can deal with world history [*Weltgeschichte*]."[12]

Auerbach usually begins his textual analysis by pointing to an isolated, salient feature immanent to a text and then, once the meaning of this feature has been explained, he expands the scope of his analysis. The features with "radiating power" that he takes as his starting point are shown to

[12] Auerbach 1969: 15. See Auerbach 1992: 94-95.

illuminate a broad spectrum of the Western literary tradition. For example, in the previously-mentioned essay on *Fleurs du Mal*, after focusing on the typically Baudelarian metaphors "barred horizon" and "damp and moldering dungeon of hell", Auerbach situates Baudelaire within the context of the European literary tradition, and concludes that he was the first poet to systematically create poetic effect through the "contradiction between the lofty tone and the indignity both of its subject as a whole and of many details" (Auerbach 1984: 206). The contrast between the grand style of Baudelaire's poetry and the common words that appear in it, which appeared to many of his contemporaries as an inconsistency of style, was "violently attacked", but has since gained acceptance. By setting out the historical context in which specific motifs, approaches, and narrative or generic techniques were still seen to be novel, Auerbach demonstrates how literary tradition evolves through a series of innovations which are clearly the fruit of individual talent but which, over time, become common heritage.

In the introduction to his last work, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Auerbach again emphasizes that the goal of his method is not analysis but synthesis. But synthesis cannot be achieved simply by compiling facts; it is necessary to select "characteristic particulars" and then "[follow] up their implications". Most important of all, Auerbach writes, is locating a point of departure – what he calls *Ansatzpunkt*: the key basis for elaborated exploration of multiple meanings that can "open up a knowledge of a broader context and cast a light on entire historical landscapes" (Auerbach 1965: 18). Auerbach writes that he first used this method in a work on French Classicism (1930): taking for his starting point the French phrase *la cour et la ville*, used in the 17th century to refer to a social stratum, and subsequently tracing the development of that social group constituting the literary public at that time,

not only in France but in other European countries as well.[13] He explains that even in his later works he would achieve broad historical synthesis by making use of a characteristic word or phrase as his starting point. But points of departure need not be words or phrases; they can also be grammatical, rhetorical, or stylistic phenomena, motifs, themes, or even "events": "Anything that is characteristic can serve the purpose." (Auerbach 1965: 19). Still, a good starting point must meet certain criteria. Whatever is selected, "must be strictly applicable to the historical material under investigation. A loose analogy will not suffice". The starting point must also be "suggestive" and have "radiating power", which is to say, be suggestive of that which is universal. Finally, abstract concepts like "the Baroque", "the Romantic", "the idea of fate", "myth", or "the concept of time" are not good starting points because they are ambiguous and inexact (Auerbach 1969: 16-17). A good point of departure must "follow directly from the material": "The starting point should not be a category which we ourselves impose on the material, to which the material must be fitted, but a characteristic found in the subject itself, essential to its history, which, when stressed and developed, clarifies the subject matter in its particularity and other topics in relation to it." (Auerbach 1965: 19)

Auerbach considers the method he used in *Mimesis*, namely the interpretation of textual passages, to be "an almost

[13] The work in question is the eponymous work "La cour et la ville", later published in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959). The literal meaning of the phrase "court and city" in the 17th century, however, denoted a specific type of theater audience that comprised courtiers, the king's entourage and court, and members of the aristocracy or grande bourgeoisie. The term "la ville" had a less obvious meaning; some writers used it to denote not all Parisians but a particular segment of the urban population: only those who frequented the refined Paris salons, so, the urban elite. Auerbach studies the semantic history of this term through the works of classic writers from Corneille to Boileau and Molière (Auerbach 1984: 135).

ideal starting point" for philological analysis. He explains that he approaches texts by asking questions of them and then seeking answers within them. In *Mimesis*, the questions pertain to the doctrine of the three styles: "In *Mimesis* I started with the ancient conception of the three levels of style and asked all the selected texts in what way they were related to it." (Auerbach 1965: 19-20) As such, the key basis of his line of inquiry begins not with texts, but with his questions. Auerbach's method of asking and answering questions, together with his proclivity for historical synthesis, unequivocally anticipated Gadamer's hermeneutics, formulated a few decades later in *Truth and Method* (1961). However, the question of how the three levels of style are used to represent everyday reality in European literature, from Homer to Joyce, serves as but a loose framework for research given the extensive material covering almost three millennia of European literary history that forms the subject of analysis in *Mimesis*. Auerbach explains that in such a broad investigation, it is inevitable that each part will present problems of its own, requiring additional points of departure. Aspects of Auerbach's approach – in particular, how recurring themes or widespread literary motifs can serve as points of departure, may be considered comparable to a subfield of comparative literature: thematology or *Stoffgeschichte*. However, it should be stated immediately for the purpose of clarification that these two approaches have nothing in common. As has been emphasized, Auerbach's interpretative philology is a *historical* method, while thematology, by contrast, is interested less in the historical treatment of recurring literary themes and motifs and more in their geographical distribution. The subject matter of historical thematology is viewed ahistorically, independently of the Zeitgeist, and only in terms of the evolution of the same subject matter. What is more, thematology is not concerned with the interpretation of a work as a

whole, focusing instead on the typology of widely diffused themes and motifs. By contrast, the object of Auerbach's philology is interpretation; specifically, a kind of interpretation that sheds light on the particular as well as the universal in a given work. Auerbach thus understands the universal element in a work in two ways: as historically universal – as the spirit (*Geist*) of a given age, and as absolutely universal – in a panhuman, existential sense.

Here, another important characteristic of Auerbach's method needs to be pointed out. As illustrated by the above examples, the first step of Auerbach's analysis, which consists of locating a starting point and selecting textual passages that will serve as a key basis for further analysis, is a subjective enterprise and largely a matter of intuition. But it is not only that first step that is a product of critical intuition. Further analysis is afforded by achieving a synthesizing view of a greater whole not just through the broad perspective gained through study but through the interpretation of a set of phenomena, and is thus ultimately an art. Auerbach does not set out to classify the evolution of West European literature according to laws or to treat vast themes conclusively, but aims for hermeneutic synthesis which elucidates both the particular and the universal in a given work. Neither Spitzer's stylistics nor Auerbach's philology are objective scientific methods; their value lies in the fact that they are critical methods that demonstrate the significance of the personal, specific experience of a given text to literature and the humanities in general. Viewed in the light of the increasingly popular methods of contemporary comparative literature, which appropriate models from the natural sciences and sociology, as seen in the examples of Moretti and Casanova, Auerbach's textual criticism, and even the motifs he traces in his investigations, can appear dated and obsolete. To critics who advocate "distant reading" or who view literature as a commodity, Auerbach's

idiosyncratic technique of allowing himself to be "guided by a few motifs" that he works out "without a specific purpose" can appear to be a waste of time and effort. Similarly, there are grounds for doubt as to whether the method of analysis that Auerbach applied to short passages, and the result of such reflection, would have been as successful had it been systematically applied to a total work. But because Auerbach's method involves the synthesis and interplay of diverse particular and universal phenomena in different world literatures, aiming to apprehend the totality of the works of humanity (i.e., arguing for a continuous historical tradition in the representation of reality), it is one of the purest forms of true comparative literature in the sense described by Wellek.[14]

The difference between Auerbach, on the one hand, and Moretti and Casanova – but also the majority of new comparatists, on the other, does not lie exclusively in their attitudes towards the aims and methods of comparative literary study. The difference runs deeper and is rooted in their divergent understanding of the nature of the humanities and their role in society. For example, according to Moretti, the objective of comparative literature is to amass as much information on as many national literatures as possible. So that such a task might be achieved, Moretti advises that comparatists forego reading original works and instead become acquainted with different literatures through secondary sources written by specialists. As he does not state the ultimate goal of this practice of acquiring information, it may be concluded that it is a goal unto itself. By contrast, Auerbach considers that to become acquainted with literary history "*ad hoc* by reading up" on unfamiliar topics in reference books "is a poor way of acquiring and using knowledge" (Auerbach 1974: 548). True literary knowledge can

[14] See above, pp. 38-39, 78, 87-92.

be achieved only through the direct experience of reading. But this knowledge is not a goal unto itself; it is, according to Auerbach, a means by which to reach a far more important goal, namely, an understanding of history in two of its Viconian aspects: as a concrete stage of development and as that which all human beings hold in common. By engaging with the greatest works of world literature, which are already of inherent value, it is possible to establish a dialogue with the past and reach an understanding of humanity both in its eternal and historical forms.

Auerbach sets another important task for the study of comparative literature: the attempt to unfold a clear and coherent view of western European civilization as a whole before it is too late and it is gone. This would safeguard its heritage from oblivion. Auerbach writes in the introduction to his last work, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, that this is a task specific to "our time", in the wake of the Second World War, and is "a task which could not have been envisaged yesterday and will no longer be conceivable tomorrow". In a tone reminiscent of the melancholic sections of his essay "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'" and certain passages in *Mimesis* – particularly the final chapter devoted to modernist writers, Auerbach here, too, predicts the end of European civilization: "European civilization is approaching the term of its existence; its history as a distinct entity would seem to be at an end, for already it is beginning to be engulfed in another, more comprehensive unity" (Auerbach 1965: 6). Ideologically conceived to counteract "the crisis of European culture['s]" barbaric "dismember[ment]" – to borrow Curtius' phrasing – from which Nazism emerged, Auerbach's methodologically sound, meticulous, and text-based approach to comparative literature had its pedigree in all of West European literature traceable over a broad span of time, from Biblical and Homeric times to ours, rejecting all borders – national or otherwise.

As such, it is understandable why he charged comparative literature with the task of preserving the memory of the civilization in which he himself lived and which he felt was irrevocably coming to an end.

In the globalized world of today, which largely justifies the predictions made by Auerbach, what might be the aim of the study of comparative literature? Of course, Auerbach's conception of philology is no longer possible because the canon of world literature has expanded beyond the confines of West European literature. But Auerbach's method of interpretative philology not only lends itself to the analysis of literary works from all over the world, but can prove more effective – where the encounter with distant cultures and their works is genuine – than the theories of not reading formulated within the framework of new comparative literature. The philological interpretive method also has an advantage over sociological comparative methods as it has preserved the good old idea that literature has a proper end that cannot be reduced to a practical ideological, philosophical, or political purpose. What is more, the field of comparative literature would no longer be a mere "laboratory for exploration at the margins" or subsidiary to sociology, as is the case today, if comparative literature were to make a return to the philological-interpretive model and if literature were to once again be the focus of literary studies. The question of whether European, world, or global literature should be studied is a separate matter altogether, extraneous to the research problem being addressed here. Still, what remains certain is that whatever its subject of investigation, the discipline must establish a sound basis for comparison between subjects. In other words, there must be sufficient resemblance between the subjects being compared, as there is in the example of the comparison of West European literatures, which share the same tradition. In this way, research will be meaningful and legitimate.

But even if a return to the philological-interpretive model proves to be overambitious, there is one thing that contemporary comparatists can do. That task, which "could not have been envisaged yesterday" and which may "no longer be conceivable tomorrow", is to preserve the history of a discipline that has at once demonstrated that literature can be studied as literature – as "a subject distinct from other activities and products of man" (Wellek 1965: 293), and that this can be done in an international framework. Our memories of a time when it was not only legitimate but also desirable to deal with literature "without specific purpose", and to sit in a library for hours contemplating a few verses or sentences, can perpetuate the "world republic of letters", where we once lived and which we now recall with nostalgia. Such nostalgia, generated by the figurative exile of certain contemporary comparatists, is not unlike Auerbach's literal exile in Istanbul. Lecturing in Istanbul while one of the most horrific wars in the history of mankind was raging in Europe, Auerbach wrote a history of world literature with the conviction that only devotion to literature would "[bring] together again those whose love for our western history has serenely been preserved" (Auerbach 1974: 557). In his later, far more pessimistic work, "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'", Auerbach reflected on the future of comparative literature and prophetically predicted the decline not only of the discipline but of philology and the humanities in general: "And already in our own time a world is emerging for which this [historical] sense no longer has much practical significance." (Auerbach 1969: 3) Although maintaining their respective differences, European cultures have succumbed to the process of "leveling" quicker than ever before; increasingly, a ubiquitous "standardization" dominates, which converges "either into European-American or into Russian-Bolshevist patterns". Auerbach was convinced that we would soon have to become accustomed "to existence in

a standardized world, to a single literary culture, only a few literary languages, and perhaps even a single literary language". With this, the idea of world literature "would be at once realized and destroyed", because Goethe's world literature does not pertain only to what is "generically common and human; rather it considers humanity to be the product of fruitful intercourse between its members" (Auerbach 1969: 2-3). Auerbach's "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'" brings piercing insight to bear on the crisis of comparative literature that has been addressed in this book. His insight is especially poignant when it is considered how the humanistic optimism characteristic of his best-known work seems to have disappeared from "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*'", even though it was written only ten years after *Mimesis*, and in the New World, untouched by the cataclysmic destruction of the Second World War.

Diversity is the presupposition for Auerbach's comparative method, which draws on the literary tradition of Vico, Goethe, and Herder. Only Auerbach's prediction that human activity would eventually be polarized has not come to pass. From the vantage point of today, in the second decade of the 21st century, it may be said that Auerbach correctly foresaw the end of the age of humanism. It is not hard to see, in his lament over the rampant ubiquity of standardization, the global world in which we now live. From today's perspective, it seems that Auerbach was wrong about one thing only: it is less a question of whether the Western literary tradition will survive than it is a question of whether any kind of literary culture, let alone the humanities or Auerbach's comparative philology, will survive.

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